

*TAPAHTÊYIMOWIN*: A HEURISTIC STUDY OF INDIGENOUS  
EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

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of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of Educational  
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By

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## ABSTRACT

I elected to initiate dialogue with three Indigenous educational leaders and explore their experiences in educational leadership, the knowledge and strategies that they employed in pursuing objectives on behalf of their communities and how making tacit knowledge and skills visible supports the development of Indigenous educational leaders. Opportunity to reflect on their experiences illuminated their struggles and achievements and helped to tell the story of Indigenous participation in educational leadership.

The bricolage (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004) conceptualizes research eclecticism useful as a lens for investigation. Parts of Western and Indigenous concepts were cobbled together into a methodology useful in exploring knowledge generated from the margins. The phenomenological practice of *bracketing* colonized narrative brings Indigenous contributions to the forefront. Heuristic research methods (Moustakas, 1990) provided a platform for learning that enlisted the experience of the researcher as a vehicle to personal reflection and new growth. The act of refashioning bits of Western methodologies into something useful for this decolonizing endeavour is an Indigenous act motivated by the conceptualization of the Trickster figure in Indigenous thought and tradition.

The research participants drew on their foundational experiences to overcome the challenges of participating in mainstream education. Through their participation, they leveraged change through commitment, expertise and innovation. I was inspired by what they knew and did that was unique to their experience and how that knowledge and those skills could be mobilized to strengthen an Indigenous position in educational leadership. The product of this research is a liberating vision of Indigenous educational leadership useful in fostering more deliberate efforts in resistance, restructuring and reclaiming to ensure greater Indigenous participation in research, epistemology and educational practice.

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I am also indebted to my parents, Cecile and Arthur, for their own unique contributions to my being and knowing and for always making do to advantage their children.

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êkosi pitamâ. kinanâskomitinawaw mistahi.

## PROLOGUE

In the Cree tradition, collective narrative memory is what puts our singular lives into larger context. Old voices echo; the ancient poetic memory of our ancestors finds home in our individual lives and allows us to reshape our experience so that we can interpret the world we find ourselves in. As we find ourselves enmeshed in the trajectories of various stories, we also make contributions to the larger narrative. While we are influenced by the stories of the *kehte-ayak* (Old Ones), we also add to the meaning of these stories through our experiences and understanding, and add in small ways to the ancient wisdom. Narratives are constantly being reinterpreted and recreated in light of shifting experiences and context. (McLeod, 2007, p. 11)

Throughout this research endeavour, I struggled to succinctly articulate the complex ideas that motivated me. The struggle was a result of my determination to accurately represent my research perspective as an Indigenous person while not assuming to speak for Indigenous people. The problem lay in my reluctance to see the process of decolonization as an Indigenous experience as equally legitimate as pre-colonized Indigenous experiences. I found clarity of purpose in the statement by McLeod (2007) who described the struggle to "...find meaning in the world as a reaction to colonization..." (p. 92). That meant understanding my place along a continuum from colonization to decolonization, returning to knowledge grounded in Indigenous worldview and articulated through Indigenous methodologies. I situate myself along that continuum, neither fully colonized nor decolonized, but fully participating in the journey.

The concept of the *bricolage* (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004) was inspirational as, for me, it legitimized employing parts of Western methodologies as an entry point to articulate an Indigenous experience. The *bricolage* offered an integrated approach to knowledge generation that I employed. I adopted useful parts of Western and Indigenous concepts to cobble together a methodology useful in exploring knowledge generated from the margins. The *bricolage* offered more than variety, though. What the *bricolage*

offered was more akin to *revolutionary entrepreneurialism* than *lost and found*. The act of refashioning bits of Western methodologies into something useful for my decolonizing endeavour was, for me, an Indigenous act. The very act of undertaking doctoral research was a Western endeavour. Pieces of Western methodologies, though, were bonded together by an Indigenous mortar. The theoretical framework of the bricolage was not only useful in obtaining knowledge and skills generated on the margins, but it was also useful in theorizing the knowledge and skills that resided there.

I was aware of just how much my perspective was influenced by my experiences and those of my family. I am a product of a French-Canadian mother who worked as a federal day school teacher on the Waterhen Lake First Nation in northwestern Saskatchewan, Canada, and my father who has lived his entire life in his First Nation community. His experience was a mix of participating in the local economy through entrepreneurship in fur trapping, raising cattle, commercial fishing and construction. He interpreted the world around him through a lens characterized by limitations and doubts imposed by his residential school experience and opportunities he created for himself despite those limitations. My experience was inextricably linked to my family history of amalgamation, marginalization and re-creation.

My family was brought into an adhesion to Treaty Six at Waterhen Lake, Saskatchewan, Canada, signed in 1921. That was part of an effort to continue to compartmentalize First Nations people and open up the northwest part of the province of Saskatchewan, Canada to further development by settlers. My grandfather's family was already on the move looking for opportunity to prosper after their own family's

marginalizing experiences as Métis and non-status Indians when they were brought into Treaty 6 at Waterhen Lake.

A combination of improved access and the damaging effects of residential schools meant that alcohol became prevalent on reserve and my dad plunged into a battle with addictions. By then my mom and dad had four children. My mom was not accustomed to an alcoholic family dynamic nor was she prepared to have her children adopt that context as the norm. She tried over the course of a few years to move our family from that context and eventually the entire family relocated to the city of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada. Not long after our relocation, my dad returned to the Waterhen Lake First Nation. That cast a division that significantly characterized our family in many ways. We enjoyed a good life, albeit with limited financial and material resources. Our objective always seemed to me, though, to be to *make do* in a place to which we were relegated.

I recall three distinct eras in my development, all with a through-line that still resonates with me today. My earliest memories are of a childhood characterized by displacement. I always felt like home should have been Waterhen Lake and that our existence was always one of waiting for repatriation. The second era of my youth was characterized by searching for an identity. This was a tenuous task when the identity that I wanted so wholeheartedly to embrace was problematic as, at that time, Indian people were openly mocked and derided in urban settings. The final era that I placed myself in was characterized by my active pursuit of change through my work as an educator and, I suppose, as an Indigenous activist of sorts.

Throughout my career as an educator, I have been called upon to participate in many consultations and leadership opportunities regarding Indigenous education. I believe that some of that participation was due to my worthwhile contributions but I am not so naive as to believe that it was all about my contributions, but also about the ability of the host to confirm Indigenous participation with the least effort and the expectation of the most familiar feedback because of my mixed heritage. There were myriad other Indigenous people that could have contributed to the consultations that I have been privileged to participate in by virtue of my gender, appearance, style of discourse and position.

Throughout the consultative experiences that I've had, I was always bothered by the lack of recognition for the skills and knowledge that Indigenous people have forged in the crucible of marginalization. What was valued was often an overly simplistic version of Indigenous knowledge articulated in themes that fit romantic expectations. Those asking for advice were rarely interested in the inventive ways that Indigenous people thrived despite so many externally imposed restrictions. I knew of the accomplishments of my family, carving out an existence in new territory throughout the late 1800's and early 1900's. I saw those *better-than-survival* strategies employed daily by my father and his contemporaries and I've employed those strategies in my own life and work. I am apt to locate my epistemological orientation in a context commensurate with the amalgam that I am and as a knowledge-seeker of necessity.

While my experiences were not uniquely Indigenous experiences, together and contextually, they represented an Indigenous experience. McLeod (2007) wrote, "Many people have attempted to articulate Indigenous models of theory. One way is to conceive



of it as a philosophical activity of reflective consciousness and an activity of thinking outside a state of affairs in the world” (p. 98). Whether articulated through the French concept of the bricolage or through the Cree term *kíkway ka osihtahk* (to improvise), my intent in this research was to recognize the source of my curiosity in the context of my experience and the potential of Indigenous people claiming the knowledge and skills born of ingenuity.

I am proud to be of mixed-blood origin, a citizen of the Waterhen Lake Cree First Nation and a member of Treaty Six. I am also proud to be a product of colonization, marginalization, resistance and invention. This is a rich identity that, I believe, is a rich source of meaning. I revel in being an amalgam: *âpihtawikosisân*, (Cree term for a mixed-blood person) in many aspects of my being and motivated by my improvisational heritage: *kíkway ka osihtahk*.

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## **CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT OF THE STUDY**

This research assembles and interprets a composite of the experiences of Indigenous educational leaders. Just as I recognized the limitations associated with being an Indigenous person in educational leadership, I was interested in the opportunities that arose out of that same context. I explored the knowledge and skills that have developed in a context between the familiar and the unfamiliar as three remarkable people drew on their strengths to accomplish great things in education and service to their communities. This research is situated between the metaphors illustrated in the quotations employed by Strega (2005) of Audre Lorde; “The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house” and Henry Louis Gates Jr.; “the master’s house will only be dismantled with the master’s tools” (p. 199). I believe there are new and effective tools that have been crafted on the margins and that those are the tools with true potential to dismantle the master’s house. I add to this discourse my belief that remnants of shared pasts, shaped by Indigenous hands, hearts and minds, will rebuild a house that is truly our own. This belief rises out of the potential of the bricolage (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005a) that is the context of the eclectic researcher who makes do by creating something new from pieces and leftovers. In Indigenous hands, traditional paradigms, diverse global philosophies and contemporary challenges are churned into new knowledge that shifts from borrower-ship to ownership through the copyright of invention. That claim was captured in Kincheloe and Berry’s (2004) recognition of:

...a researcher’s ... social location of his or her personal history [where]... the researcher-as-bricoleur abandons the quest for some naïve concept of realism, focusing instead on the clarification of his or her position in the web of reality and the social locations of other researchers and the ways they shape the production and interpretation of knowledge. (p. 2)

Exploring knowledge through the lens of a bricoleur placed primacy on discovery commissioned by need and vision.

My initial inspiration for this research was the Supreme Court of Canada 2004 decision in *Haida Nation v. British Columbia* (*Haida Nation v. British Columbia*, 2004). That case upheld a decision that imputes responsibility on government to consult with Aboriginal communities prior to decisions that might affect Aboriginal interests. The order was to uphold the honour of the Crown and invoke consultation where future Indigenous or Treaty rights might be affected (Newman, 2009). The phrase from the Supreme Court of Canada decision, *no sharp dealings*, captured the potential for deceit in the relationship between Indigenous peoples and government and their agents. What my experience and position have fostered in me was the desire to resist sharp dealings. *No sharp dealings* promised a balanced and honest exchange. Knowing what one wants out of consultation requires knowing what one has to put in. Emancipation from guarding against deception fosters the emergence of strength of experience and inventiveness of generations of living on the margins. The Duty to Consult awakened in me a sense of anticipation and opportunity. Anticipation was a result of wondering if the avoidance of sharp dealings was even possible with a playing field tilted by centuries of colonial-inspired marginalization. Opportunity was inspired by the thought that Indigenous peoples have learned so much in that colonized space (Battiste, 2000). What has been learned is beyond survival. The ability to adapt and thrive has flourished. I was inspired by what Indigenous educational leaders knew and did that was unique to their experience and how that knowledge and skill could be mobilized to strengthen their contribution to educational policy and practice.

A phenomenological gaze into the interaction of person and object provides opportunity to derive meaning from experience as human beings traverse the world (Crotty, 1998). The phenomenological tradition of distilling experiences into essences (Moustakas, 1994) constituted, for me, deeply moving depictions of human experience, as fleeting as essences may be. The concept of essences is problematic as just as an essence is described, the context and experience continue to evolve, rendering the essence obsolete. I used the term essence as an unstable quality, only able to evidence the moment the story is told, while the storyteller continues the journey. The richness of the careful handling of human experience, combined with the skillful use of language, was a product of research that I aspired to co-create and share in the hopes of similarly inspiring others.

The French term *bricolage* has its roots in an anthropological usage as described by Levi-Straus in *The Savage Mind* (1966). I beg the reader to move past the deeply offensive title, even when corrected for time and translation, and paternalistic orientation and defer instead to its modern manifestation as described by Kincheloe and Berry (2004). The concept of the *bricolage* inspired me as it offered a conceptual foundation for the kind of research that is crafted with tools cast off by the mainstream (Crotty, 1998). That metaphorically worked as the colonized-Indigenous experience is an experience of being relegated to the margins but it is within those margins that Indigenous peoples have thrived. I was keenly interested in the knowledge and skills commensurate with the margins, knowledge and skills that are unique to a people, a place and a time. Moving through this inquiry with the skill of the *bricoleur* allowed navigation with tools that emerged from the phenomenon: a cobbled together, useful and

sometimes inventive approach to locating cobbled-together, useful and sometimes inventive knowledge and skills.

Among the qualitative research methodologies available to me, heuristic research provided the phenomenological inspiration to make meaning of lived experience (Moustakas, 1994) in a manner that "...explicitly acknowledges the involvement of the researcher..." (Hiles, 2002, p. 3). Heuristic inquiry "...is inherently phenomenological in nature, and ... seeks to uncover the meaning and essence of human experience from the frame of reference of the experiencing person" (Back, 2002, p. 92). The most alluring characteristic of heuristic research was the definitiveness of purpose, assembling a composite of experience with a phenomenon that answers a deep curiosity that resides within the researcher (Moustakas, 1990). Heuristic research allowed for a blurring of the lines between the researcher and the research participants as it employed the currency of common experience (Moustakas, 1990). Heuristic research accounts for "...the critical importance and pervasive role of the researcher's qualities, sensitivities, and being in all phases of ...[the]... research project" (Braud & Anderson, 1998, p. 20). It was recognition of my personal investment that caused me to recognize the impossibility of decoupling my experience and research interests. My experience motivated and shaped the question, derived the content and determined the methodology. Those personal motivators provided the underpinnings of the research and offered a reminder that the tacit dimension is an overlooked source of knowledge (Moustakas, 1990). As Polanyi (1973) stated, "...our personal participation ... governs the richness of concrete experience to which our speech can refer. Only by the aid of this tacit coefficient could we ever say anything at all about experience..." (p. 87). I posit that contemporary

Indigenous experience is replete with tacit knowledge held in what we inherently know but typically don't say. Recognition of personal investment in research and a priority for mobilizing tacit knowledge was my motivation for adopting heuristic research.

This chapter begins with a statement of opportunity that frames the research in context. I then outline the purpose and significance of the research. Following the research questions, I provide a conceptual organizer that will serve as a through-line in this inquiry. Lastly, I provide an overview of the organization of the dissertation.

### **Opportunity**

Ramifications of the *Haida vs. B.C. (Haida Nation v. British Columbia, 2004)* ruling have been assessed and experienced by Indigenous peoples, government and industry for over a decade. The decision raised implications for consultation in other sectors as well. In the Saskatchewan context, the implications for emerging expectations concerning relationships with Indigenous peoples are significant as Indigenous population growth is rapid and sustained (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2009). Considering recent case law, the Government of Saskatchewan produced a consultation policy framework to guide parties in making decisions that might adversely affect Treaty or Aboriginal rights (Government of Saskatchewan, 2010). In the Provincial education sector, the Government developed public policy increasingly shaped by the growing Aboriginal population, (i.e. *Inspiring Success: Building Toward Student Achievement*, Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2009; *A Time for Significant Leadership: A Strategy for Implementing First Nations and Métis Education Goals*, Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2010; *Education Sector Strategic Plan 2014-2020*, Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2014). Despite the role that the Aboriginal population played in

motivating new initiatives, there remained questions as to whether the Saskatchewan Government, "...in formulating policy in social, economic or political spheres, [gave] foremost consideration to the impact of such policies on the physical, social, emotional and spiritual health of Aboriginal citizens..." (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). Heightened moral and legal expectations for consultation with Aboriginal peoples, as expressed by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996), the Supreme Court of Canada (*Haida Nation v. British Columbia*, 2004), The Joint Task Force on Improving Education and Employment Outcomes for First Nations and Métis Peoples (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2013) and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015) all have implications for current consultative processes.

This research was motivated by and contributes to Indigenous peoples' advancements toward reclaiming voice (Battiste, 2000) and bringing Indigenous paradigms into public sector policies and programs (Smith, 1999). Through the articulation of the voices of some who have parleyed with educational policy makers, this research offers insight into a unique experience wrought with meaning. Participation and passionate contribution illuminate an experience that serves those with interest in the exchange.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this research was to make meaning of the experiences of Indigenous educational leaders. Through descriptions of the phenomenon of interest, this research endeavour was to create a composite useful to current and future Indigenous educational leaders as they continue to construct their way forward in their personal and

professional lives. It was in the descriptions of those experiences that inventive skills and strategies provided opportunity to refocus consultation and reinvigorate productive collaboration toward shared concerns.

My motivation for focusing on description of the experiences of Indigenous educational leaders was that their experiences were the fulcrum between Indigenous influence and the broader context in which Indigenous education unfolds. Hegemony inherent in the interactions of Indigenous people within mainstream society can characterize the relationship. Where that exchange has the potential to unlock progress, demonstrate the potential in consultation and the capacity of Indigenous contributions, the context must be examined and re-visioned. Re-visioning is part of the growth of a knowledge society where the capacity of communities finds a place in addressing contemporary issues with Indigenous community knowledge (Davis, 2009). Going to the description of the experience of participating in this milieu has the potential to identify opportunity for Indigenous leadership's problem solving as a new currency in advancing Indigenous participation and outcomes in education.

This research applies Indigenous knowledge to a contemporary problem for which current knowledge and practices are ill prepared to bring resolution. More broadly, this research is associated with how Indigenous students fair in education as Indigenous educational leadership share responsibility for improved student learning outcomes. At the broad level there may be common themes and approaches to promoting the success of Indigenous students. The problem is polarized, though, where solutions are proposed. Polarization happens with competing interests, voice and authority. The problem of who drives change is sustained because Indigenous student success is achieved incrementally



and so the debate regarding interest, voice and influence in finding solutions continues. Where Indigenous experience, ideals and influence are either invisible or contested, Indigenous contributions to authentic solution building is be impeded.

I was motivated by cumulative Indigenous achievements and a shifting balance of authority and influence in a mainstream, globalized, digitized, knowledge society. The journeys of the study participants in Indigenous educational leadership inspired me and were worth examining and learning from. Where contest goes unexamined, we fail to recognize and take up achievements born of problem solving and contributing to capacity building. With an appreciative perspective on experience, Indigenous educational leaders may learn from the mapping of their journey and contribute with renewed purpose. This research aimed to elicit a collective volition and endorse familiar pathways that lead to good decisions. It establishes a new context in which to describe, interpret and learn from a collective, liberating experience.

### **Significance**

The product of this research is a conceptualization of the phenomenon of Indigenous educational leadership and tacit knowledge of associated strategies and tools innovated on the margins. As a knowledge society produces important understandings of social currency that contributes a composite of experience for solving complex problems (Gilbert, 2005), the potential of identifying value in a contested space is immense. This research motivates a reconceptualization of a space of exchange cast in a diversified context. It demonstrates the capacity of Indigenous peoples by identifying a phenomenon that puts Indigenous peoples at the centre, unravels consultations and takes Indigenous ways into theory and practice.

## **Terminology**

The dynamism of Indigenous peoples means that we are able to name ourselves differently according to the context. All people do so by invoking various roles: son, brother, dad. We also name ourselves differently according to geography: resident, tourist, migrant. Of course, there are myriad descriptions associated with socio-political circumstances: citizen, expatriate, prisoner. This dissertation employs three historical or socio-political terms: Indigenous, Indian and Aboriginal. Indigenous is the default term describing the original inhabitants of North America and their descendants. Indigenous is a globally and academically accepted term for original peoples. Indian is used sparingly to refer to Indigenous peoples referring to themselves or their communities at the time when the term was commonplace. The study participants occasionally refer to themselves or their communities as Indian, typically if referring to a context in the 1960's or 70's. Aboriginal is the term for the same peoples as described in the Canadian Constitution (1982). I use Aboriginal to maintain context when that term is explicitly used.

## **Research Questions**

The primary question that guided this research was consistent with the heuristic pursuit of “the nature of meaning of experience: (Moustakas, 1994, p. 17). The first derivative of the primary question focused the inquiry on the proprietary craft of Indigenous educational leadership. The second derived question invited meaning making from those experiences. The research questions were:

1. What is the experience of Indigenous educational leadership?

- a. What knowledge and strategies do Indigenous educational leaders employ in pursuing objectives on behalf of their communities?
- b. How can making tacit knowledge and skills visible support the development of Indigenous educational leaders?

Commensurate with the iterative nature of heuristic research, the research questions guided the inquiry as they were further defined through the inquiry. Key to heuristic research is a deep allegiance to the question. After living with my research curiosity for many years, I could articulate the questions in many forms, suited to the nuance of the conversation. The questions are a manifestation of the burning question that unsettled and badgered for a response. The key question was more accurately described as what kept me up at night. Those questions helped to guide the inquiry by helping to keep it on track and contribute to coherence in a complex study. A curiosity burned into one's consciousness is a greater master, accomplishing a discipline far greater than three sentences written in the form of a question. Inquiring about experience, strategies and meaning served as useful proxies for what kept me up at night and, ultimately, served to quench the fire fueled by questions of place, power, marginalization, emancipation and the satisfaction of victory.

### **Conceptual Organizer**

The journey in this research was, for me, an Indigenous pursuit. Much of the language that I used to describe the research, though, was non-Indigenous in origin so I heeded the words of Ritchie (as cited in Grande, 2000), who said, "When we speak the language of our oppressor, we must be aware of how we are being swallowed up by concepts we did not create..." (p. 354). The precariousness of an Indigenous foray

further into mainstream territory (*counting coup*) is ever-present. As my transparency of influence describes the point of departure into this research, let it be the experiences of the research participants that ultimately tell the tale of the usefulness of exploring experiences from the margins. Still, it was useful to describe the analytical lens that emerged and guided my interpretation of the data. I employed the Cree term for improvisation, *kîkway ka osihtahk*, in an effort to metaphorically represent my curiosities in an Indigenous framework.

The framework was a result of me contemplating how to use the concept of the bricolage to move closer to an Indigenous orientation of the concepts and ideas that motivated this research. The framework predated my discovery of the bricolage as I was inspired by the bricolage because it named what I had witnessed in the better-than-survival work of countless Indigenous people, especially my father. The model represented my conceptualization of the process of uncovering new knowledge from a colonized space. It was an epistemology of liberation that best represented the orientation to new knowledge discovery that I used throughout this work.

The most influential context that I have seen *kîkway ka osihtahk* employed was with my father in his context. He continually looked out upon his environment for potential solutions to contextual problems. Those problems might have been how to haul a 1,500 pound moose out of a densely forested area far from home. The problem might have entailed creating a part for a broken tractor when parts for the tractor would be too expensive, too far away and likely no longer produced. It might have also included steps in securing financing for construction equipment with limited capital security as a result of Indian Act (1985) property laws. Those may seem like experiences common to many

but they have a commonality in a marginalized Indigenous experience because they represent problems characterized by a lack of means resulting from colonization and marginalization.

When my father employed a problem-solving approach when freeing a truck from deep mud, getting a moose out of the muskeg, removing fish from a net or fixing a chainsaw without the proper parts, his lens was different than mine. He employed a lens of necessity, maybe motivated by survival, but with an efficacy that was no less than how those unfettered by similar limitations might act. My father also had elaborate trading contacts and skills. He would make a litany of deals involving a damaged water tank, a past-its-usefulness horse, access to pasture land and a string of beaver traps to eventually acquire the harness that was absolutely necessary to hay the pasture to be able to feed his cattle through the winter. Later he would spend time grinding, welding, cutting and tying before the tractor would chug back into existence.

I felt a sense of kinship in reading Kaomea's (2016) description of her father's experience in her reflection that:

My father's toolkit ... is a bricoleur's toolkit. My father is an 84-year-old Native Hawaiian man who has been fixing things all his life. He's what Hawaiians call a *laukua* or a jack-of-all-trades. Consequently, his toolkit is more varied than a mechanic's toolkit, enabling him to accomplish a diversity of tasks. Like many Hawaiian families, my father's family didn't have a lot of money when he was growing up. Therefore, when things fell into disrepair, he learned to fix them using whatever tools he could find. For this reason, his toolkit isn't fancy, shiny, or expensive. It's simply an assortment of tools that he's gathered through the years. (p. 100)

In addition to Kaomea (2016) articulating her father's ability to make do, she captured the inventive genius of the bricoleur in her statement that, "Another wonderful thing about my father's toolkit is that, in addition to using his tools to fix things, he also uses

them to build or create contraptions of his own" (Kaomea, 2016, p. 100). That inventive acuity is, for me, inspirational as well as indicative of a latent skillset worth extrapolating for emancipatory purposes.

Late in this study I was discussing with my friend and colleague, Delvin Kanêwiyakihô, from the Littlepine First Nation, my frustration with the literal translation of improvisation to *kîkway ka osihtahk*. My motivation for the translation was to begin to distance from the concepts that motivated me and to prepare an analytical receptor for the participants' contributions. I explained the bricolage and inquired about a term that might do justice to the strength of the concept of the bricolage. Kanêwiyakihô (D. Kanêwiyakihô, personal communication, January 22, 2016) offered that a term might not be what I was looking for but a concept. He related the role of *wîsahkêcâhk*, the Cree Trickster. I choose not to teach about the complex role of *wîsahkêcâhk* as I come to an understanding of her/his role more from a literary tradition than from rich, first-hand experience as described by Wilson (1998) in her impassioned recounting of the role of story as a part of the fabric of being in her Cree family. I will relate, however, the role that Kanêwiyakihô described as useful in understanding the role of the participants in making do and making something with what was available to them. Kanêwiyakihô described that *wîsahkêcâhk* encountered all beings, plant and animal alike, and manipulated their characteristics as s/he went, making them fit for being in the world. Where some took liberties with their role, *wîsahkêcâhk* returned to curtail their attributes. Through her/his traversing the world, making and fixing, s/he achieved the perfection that the prodigy of those beings embody today.

Kanêwiyakihô's (2016) teaching allowed me to understand that the term is not the receptive organizer but the concept. The act of making perfect fairly represented what I experienced in the stories of the participants. As they traversed through their experiences, they fixed, created and adjusted what they encountered. The result was an Indigenous educational context that was of their making. It was the best that they could make with what they had and it fulfilled their role. The analytical organizer, then, looked to witness the humble act of making. The presentation of the data in chapter four benefited from that organizer as their experiences told tales of invention, culminating in a shared creation of a creative synthesis of the findings.

### **Organization of the Dissertation**

Chapter two presents literature that provided context for this research in the areas of Indigenous voice, participation and opportunity. Indigenous voice focuses on the Indigenous research ethics context that undergirds a renewed Indigenous participation in Western research and institutions. Indigenous academics advanced Indigenous participation in academia, which more broadly influenced Indigenous participation. An examination of the leadership and policy contexts of Indigenous educational leadership helped to understand the contemporary milieu of the research participants. Lastly, an overview of the Duty to Consult describes the context of opportunity available to them.

Chapter three, research design and methodology, begins with an analytical framework that explores my ontological and epistemological positions as well as my theoretical perspective. I then provide an overview of heuristic research and the data collection and analysis methods that I employed.

Chapter four presents the data through individual depictions, a composite depiction, exemplary portraits and a creative synthesis. Those standards of heuristic research were woven together with my reaction and responses to those pieces. Chapter five presents the findings and conclusions, a decolonizing leadership heuristic useful for Indigenous educational leadership and implications of the study.

### **Conclusion**

This introduction situated the research within a context of an inquiry motivated by the desire to improve conditions that allowed for an authentic contribution of Indigenous educational leaders to educational policy development. By inquiring into those experiences, this research contributes an understanding of the phenomenon of the exchange. This research-as-claiming project is a small step in decolonization as it aims to restore, within the context of educational leadership, by asking not *what you can do for me* but *what we will do for ourselves and each other*.



## CHAPTER2: LITERATURE REVIEW

A researcher that purports to build knowledge from the experiences of research participants must be careful in using a literature review as a point of departure (Creswell, 2007). The phenomenological underpinnings of heuristic research that seek meaning from human encounters with experience provide an important perspective on the role of the literature review. Phenomenological inquiry yields a priori theory to description and meaning achieved through analysis of the descriptions of encounters with the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). In a phenomenological study, the researcher has a responsibility to be aware of the context surrounding the phenomenon and use that awareness to heighten one's ability to produce effective questions, appropriately frame the descriptions and draw participants ever closer to arriving at the description of the experience of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). As description distills, theory can be brought to bear to continue to assist with interpretation. A literature review for a study inspired by phenomenology, then, can be employed to develop context, to legitimate the inquiry and to prepare a context in which to receive the descriptions of the phenomenon.

Reviewing the broad Indigenous educational leadership research context could have been overwhelming expect for the touchstone of *kikway ka osihtahk* (to improvise). Contextualizing Indigenous ingenuity entailed the mapping of the confluence of the emergence, exercise and promise of Indigenous voice, participation and influence. As that developmental continuum emerged with relative ease, the content that would eventually populate the continuum through the literature review required greater discernment. The exercise of Indigenous voice and participation in Canada was manifest in diverse ways while originating from common experiences and historical markers. A

significant marker included the consciousness-raising of the early 70's malcontent prompted by the 1969 White Paper that threatened the very survivability of Indigenous peoples as distinct in Canada. Though Indigenous response to the threat of loss of being was multi-faceted, arguably one of the most influential liberating movements was the advocacy that defined Indigenous knowledge and carved out a niche in academia. That history is relevant to this study as it characterized the academic milieu that the participants mobilized within. Participation in the academy contributed to the exercise of leadership potential and, accordingly, to shaping of the Indigenous leadership context. That participation warranted a tour of Indigenous leadership and policy themes. Completing the circle are the future oriented opportunities of Indigenous educational leaders held in trust in the promise of contributions fortified by the tenacity of resistance and the mastery of participation. That future orientation is examined through a tour of the Duty to Consult.

The Indigenous research community's ability to affect change in the norms of knowledge-access protocol was an important contextual consideration prefacing this study. That context provided the liberating tools to assemble a research initiative that aimed to capture a culture of malcontent of Indigenous peoples and the strength of resolve inherent in a response mounted on the tenacity of the re-instituting of Indigenous knowledge. The leadership and policy development contexts associated with Indigenous peoples and leadership described the environment in which the research participants practiced. It described a broad policy context that may be characterized as a contested space (Ermine, 1995) as a result of Indigenous-non-Indigenous or minority-majority relations. The final section of the literature review explores the Duty to Consult as a

consultative framework that characterizes the imperative of respectful participation and serves as a reference for the participants' experiences.

### **Indigenous Knowledge and Research**

The realization of Indigenous participation in academia was a strong influence in literature that both motivated and contextualized this research. Exposing and deconstructing colonialism fostered a resurgence of Indigenous knowledge. Much of that work emerged from discourse aimed at defining Indigenous knowledge access protocols that contributed to changed practice and facilitated a continuance of the cycle.

There are a variety of tools (Smith, 1999) that Indigenous peoples have assumed or innovated in the protection and proliferation of Indigenous knowledge. Indeed, a major tenet of this research was the surfacing of knowledges and processes used by Indigenous educational leaders in furthering their agendas in educational leadership. Elaboration of the landscape of decolonization assisted in describing the richness of knowledge and strategies developed under the gaze of the colonizer. Useful bodies of knowledge to elucidate this inquiry included explorations of decolonization and Indigenous knowledge globally and the resulting influence on the context of research with Indigenous peoples.

### **Indigenous Knowledge**

I looked to the literature for a credible and generally accepted definition of the complex concept of Indigenous knowledge. The United Nations *Principles and Guidelines for the Protection of the Heritage of Indigenous People* (United Nations, 2000) identified the role of Indigenous peoples as the "...source, the guardians and the interpreters of their heritage, whether created in the past, or developed by them in the

future” (p. 9). The ownership of Indigenous heritage was identified as collective and inalienable and inextricably linked to traditional lands and territories (United Nations, 2000). Battiste (1999) described that "Indigenous knowledge flows from the relationship within the global flux that needs to be renewed, their kinship with the other living creatures and life energies embodied in their land, and their kinship with the spirit world" (p. 4). That rich and vibrant description of Indigenous knowledge offered a glimpse of its complexity that needed to be nurtured in a holistic fashion through Indigenous understandings.

Indigenous knowledges are characterized by holism, reinforced by Duran and Duran’s (1995) assessment of Indigenous knowledge as spatial rather than linear (p. 14) and Indigenous thinking as process as opposed to content thinking (p. 15). Further, they expressed that Indigenous experience is characterized by non-compartmentalization where the totality of personality, rather than separate systems, is the dominant characteristic of the individual (p. 15). Addressing knowledge in a holistic context, Henderson (2000a) described that:

Aboriginal worldviews teach that everyone and everything is part of a whole, and each is interdependent with all the others. Each person has a right to a personal identity as a member of a community but also has a responsibility to other life forms and to the ecology of the whole. It is inconceivable that a human being can exist without a relationship with the keepers of the life forces (totems), and extended family, or his or her wider kin. (p. 269)

The literature extended the holistic nature of Indigenous knowledge beyond the confines of human thought to the environments that human beings reside within.

Henderson (2000a) posited, “Aboriginal thought and identity are centered on the environment in which Aboriginal people live. As Aboriginal people experienced the forces of an ecosystem, Aboriginal worldviews, languages, consciousness, and order

arose” (p. 252). He illustrated the ties that Indigenous peoples have with their natural environment and the sophistication of that relationship.

Atleo (2004) brought a perspective on Indigenous knowledge that was rooted in kinship and community norms. He expressed that the family and community characteristic of “...*Tsawalk* is that there is a unity, or meaningful interrelationship, between all the variables of existence...” (p. 125). Atleo’s description of the primacy of interrelationships reinforced Indigenous knowledge as the antithesis of Western compartmentalization. His conceptualization of relatedness was reinforced by Littlebear, (2000) who described:

The ‘spider web’ of relations ensures that the welfare of the group is the most important thing in Aboriginal societies. The value of wholeness tells the members that, if all do their parts, then social order will be the result. It is as though everybody is a “cop” and nobody is a “cop.” If the “whole” is maintained, then beauty, harmony, and balance result. (p. 84)

Ermine (1995) furthered the conceptualization of relatedness with his description that:

For the Cree, the phenomenon of *mamatowan* refers not just to the self but to the being in connection with happenings. It also recognizes that other life forms manifest the creative force in the context of the knower. It is an experience in context; a subjective experience that, for the knower, becomes knowledge itself. The experience is knowledge. (p. 104)

That perspective identified knowledge in the interaction of all living elements of people and planet, yielding the primacy of humankind to the whole. Participation in Indigenous knowledge, claimed Ermine, (1995) was an introspective endeavour that caused the individual to examine the self in relation to all spiritual and physical elements. Ermine (1995) described introspection as “the fascination with inwardness [that]... has continued the quest for enlightenment in existence” (p. 105). He described an ongoing enlightenment journey through inward inquiry. Ermine explained, “It was in the self that

the richest source of information could be found by delving into the metaphysical and the nature and origin of knowledge” (p. 108).

Testament to the continuity of global discourse in Indigenous knowledge, there was great convergence of concepts and ideals within the diversity of Indigenous knowledges. The specifics of local models and examples converge in definitions that resonated with Indigenous peoples wherever they reside.

### **Marginalization**

Indigenous knowledge was further defined in relation to how it has been impacted by Western knowledge and how Indigenous peoples and communities have resisted being subsumed by Western knowledges. Littlebear (2000) succinctly described the *why* behind pressures in Indigenous knowledge by the influence of the majority Western influence:

Every society has many deep-rooted and implicit assumptions about what life and reality are all about. These assumptions are the guidelines for interpreting laws, rules, customs, and actions. It is deep-rooted and implicit assumptions upon which attitudes are based that make a person say “this is the way it is.” It is these assumptions that make it hard for a person to appreciate an alternative way of thinking and behaving. (p. 83)

The challenge of seeing through another set of eyes resulted in diminishing influences on minority Indigenous knowledges.

Smith’s (1999) *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* was a thorough analysis of the effects of colonialism and Indigenous resistance efforts manifest in Indigenous knowledge. She positioned the global proliferation of colonization as the actualization of the enlightenment search for new knowledge and the resulting industrialization, liberalism and more broadly accessible education deemed essential to support the growth of liberalism. Smith stated, “It is important to

remember...that colonialism was not just about collection. It was also about re-arrangement, re-presentation and re-distribution” (p. 62). Smith reminded the reader that collection and codification were not the end in and of themselves, but that improvement was the goal. She identified Darwinism as the tool that justified manipulation and resulted in the decimation of ecosystems and people as an exercise of the survival of the fittest.

Smith implicated a complex colonial mechanism in the assault on Indigenous knowledge. She identified Western knowledge as viewing the individual as the basic social unit and building block of society rooted in Western religions and the concept of personal salvation. Smith described as contrary to Indigenous worldview the emphasis on community primacy over individual pursuit and the separation of the individual from the environment as a compartmentalization foreign to Indigenous peoples.

Sillitoe (2002) suggested that the Indigenous knowledge-Western science dichotomy is “...not ... about two tenuously connected knowledge traditions separated by a cultural-epistemological gulf, but rather a spectrum of relations” (p. 111). This did not suggest that there were no differences but that the differences were experienced more in the value that each is given. Sillitoe related:

The stark polar discrimination ... tends to depict science as more rational, better integrated, having a strong theoretical model, and better grounded in evidence with controlled experiments and so on. It may even suggest differences in thought processes and intellectual capacity between scientists and non-scientists... (p. 111)

The counter to Indigenous perspective is manifest everyday in the singularity of Western knowledge. Smith (1999) identified the ramifications within the cycle of liberalism, individualism, discovery and new knowledge that allowed traditional

knowledge systems to be viewed as a commodity to be exploited. She identified the scientific method and its classification and codification systems as tools of the imperial collection of new knowledges. Empiricism and colonization, according to Smith, became the tools of choice in the discovery, exploration and profiling of Indigenous peoples. Indigenous knowledges became the property of the cultural archive of the West. Western knowledge, claimed Smith, consumed Indigenous knowledges and became the universal knowledge. She posited that academic disciplines rooted in classical and enlightenment philosophies were not built to recognize and respect other knowledge systems; hence, there was an aloof, non-response to claims of Indigenous knowledge. Smith implied that Western dominance was not benign and that the Western knowledge systems, in fact, continued the dominance and cooptation of Indigenous knowledge. She underlined this point with an emphatic statement that:

The values, attitudes, concepts and language embedded in beliefs about spirituality represent ... the clearest contrast and mark of difference between indigenous peoples and the West. It is one of the few parts of ourselves which the West cannot decipher, cannot understand and cannot control...yet. (p. 74)

Henderson (2000b) offered a perspective on the sustained effects of colonization on Indigenous peoples and provided an Indigenous response. He named the sustained subordination and control of Indigenous peoples through the changing rules of the game. Henderson claimed, “The anti-trickster represents a cognitive force of artificial European thought, a differentiated consciousness, ever changing in its creativity to justify oppression and domination of contemporary Indigenous peoples and their spiritual guardians” (p. 58). Henderson used the anti-trickster as a metaphor for Eurocentrism. He positioned artificial thought that sustained suppression as a now central element in law, opinion and scholarship. Henderson (2000c) stated, “We are not living in our own



worldviews or visions. We exist in the contrived institutional and conscious realms of a failed colonization, often wrongly confused with the idea of civilization and modernity” (p. 164). Henderson’s example was indicative of the contemporary face attributed to colonization and the resulting evidence of ongoing efforts at decolonization.

Ermine’s (1995) position was that the “inward journeys” by Aboriginal peoples were nearly abandoned because of the onslaught of outward exploration by Western Europeans. He emphasized that “... the Western world has capitulated to a dogmatic fixation on power and control at the expense of authentic insights into the nature and origin of knowledge as truth” (p. 102) and that “Aboriginal people should be wary of Western conventions that deny the practice of inwardness and fortitude to achieve transformative holism” (p. 103).

Simpson (2004) added a dimension to the argument that reinforced where the power resides in the exchange between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. She claimed that Western science came to Indigenous knowledge when it needed to access shrinking ecological knowledge, for example, but it did this out of necessity rather than a true valuing of Indigenous knowledge. Simpson cautioned that current interest in Indigenous knowledge were no more ready to respectfully treat Indigenous knowledge than was the empirical collection of enlightenment. According to Simpson, collection aimed to exploit the content of Indigenous knowledge without respecting the corresponding Indigenous community context that was vital for its survival.

Smith (1999) identified a significant effect that resonated through Indigenous communities. The insidiousness of colonization has had an influence on the very identity of Indigenous peoples. She argued that Indigenous peoples, with the acquisition and

codification of knowledge from the colonies, became victims of identity control and confusion. Smith lamented that the:

Questions of who is a “real indigenous” person, what counts as a “real indigenous leader,” which person displays “real cultural values” and the criteria used to assess the characteristics of authenticity are frequently the topic of conversation and political debate. (p. 72)

She identified the troublesome situation that has developed in which the colonizer chooses the most familiar to recognize as the legitimate voice of Indigenous people. She then described the highly ironic tendency of “pale” Indigenous people to then not be recognized as authentic by the very Western paradigms that contributed to eradication of Indigenous peoples and knowledge. Authentic Indigenous cultures are thought to be those that have had no contact with the colonizing Westerner. Indigenous people that express a voice of resistance to colonization are deemed to be less Indigenous, therefore discrediting their critique.

Of the grip of defining power that the West has over Indigenous peoples, Atleo (2004) stated, “It is a most arrogant position to hold because it attributes inordinate and unreasonable powers of transformation to the colonizers” (p. 76). Littlebear (2000) added a dimension of internalization in that:

Perspectives on authenticity and truth are now present among Indigenous peoples as well and that ... this shared worldview is always contested, and this paradox is part of what it means to be colonized. Everyone attempts to understand these ways of viewing the world and to make choices about how to live his or her life. (p. 85)

The literature painted a landscape of imposed confusion by the colonizers and an adoption of that confusion by the colonized. The lingering effect has implications for identity, perceptions, voice and authenticity.

In addition to the effect on perception and identity, Duran and Duran (2000) illustrated the effect of the appropriation of Indigenous knowledge and identity by Western codification and objectification. They proposed that when the rightful owners and voice of Indigenous knowledge are continually ignored or undermined, Indigenous peoples are prevented from staking a claim in their birthright that sustains Indigenous ways and worldview. They identified that the stalemate that Western approaches to knowledge have promoted mean that future research work with Indigenous peoples is in jeopardy of sustaining illegitimate Western pronouncements of what constitutes Indigenous knowledge. Duran and Duran stated, "When Western subjectivities [are] imposed on colonized people, not only will the phenomenon under scrutiny evade the lens of positivism, but further hegemony will also be imposed on the community (p. 87). They called for an end to rewarding knowledge that "... reifies the thought of Western Europeans above all others" (p.6) and added that "to assume that phenomenon from another worldview can be adequately explained from a totally foreign worldview is the essence of psychological and philosophical imperialism" (p. 25). The self-perpetuating characteristic of colonialism put intense pressures on new iterations of Indigenous knowledge where questions of authenticity and ownership were coupled with questions of whether the vessel that carried the inquiry was a Trojan horse for colonialism.

The literature painted a picture of threats of disregard or diminishment of Indigenous knowledge perpetuated by Western knowledge through its dominance and the adoption of diminishing attitudes by Indigenous peoples and communities.

## Resurgence

The literature related the effect and response of a perpetuated and self-sustaining colonialism on the association of Indigenous peoples. Smith (1999) identified a response among Indigenous peoples that she identified as a "...social movement [that] started as a movement of people to become a movement of peoples" (p. 108). That association as a result of subordination recognized that Indigenous peoples "...are united by common territories, cultures, traditions, histories, languages, institutions and beliefs. [They] ...share a sense of kinship and identity, a consciousness as distinct peoples and a political will to exist as distinct people" (p. 115). Henderson (2000b) stated that by fully understanding the strategies of the colonizer employed in colonialism, a new vision of Indigenous renewal could occur. He called on a traditional pursuit that resisted the onslaught of colonization in associating *ghost dancing* to contemporary knowledge of the colonizers' strategies. According to Henderson, ghost dancing forced the spirits underground to be called upon for future generations so that they might be protected from eradication. Henderson (2000a) posited that Indigenous communities were taking responsibility for protecting Indigenous knowledge with the mission that "to acquire freedom in the decolonized and de-alienated order, the colonized must break their silence and struggled to retake possession of their humanity and identity" (p. 249). Just as Western empirical thought was limiting and colonization perpetuating, re-emergence of Indigenous paradigms put structures in place that have the opposite effect so that the "restoring [of] Aboriginal worldviews and languages ...realiz[e] Aboriginal solidarity and power (Henderson, 2000a, p. 252).

Laenui (2000) contributed to the dialogue regarding an acquired tenacity of Indigenous peoples as a response to colonization. He noted, “Colonization and decolonization are social processes more than they are political processes. Governance over people changes only after the people themselves have sufficiently changed” (p. 150). Recognition of that effect suggested that the future of colonization was largely in the hands of Indigenous peoples to pursue decolonization on their own terms. Henderson’s (2000a) essay on *Empowering Aboriginal Thought*, was an impassioned call to the colonized not only to rediscover Indigenous heritage and the manners in which to access and use that heritage, but to put it to work to take back definition of self and community. Henderson concluded his essay by stating that:

As the Seventh Fire teachings say, in rekindling the old flame of the Seventh Fire, the new people will emerge. They will have to retrace their steps to find what was left by the trail: the task will not be easy. As Aboriginal people, we must reclaim our worldviews, knowledges, languages and order to find the path ahead. (p. 274)

The conditions that sustained the effects of colonization and situated resolution within the strategies of the colonized endorsed the use of traditional Indigenous constructs in resolving colonization. The cyclical nature of decolonization and the return to Indigenous knowledge characterized contemporary literature on the subject. Littlebear (2000) identified that:

The function of Aboriginal values and customs is to maintain the relationships that hold creation together. If creation manifests itself in terms of cyclical patterns and repetitions then the maintenance and renewal of those patterns is all important. Values and customs are the participatory part that Aboriginal people play in the maintenance of creation. (p. 81)

That statement tied the responsibility of Indigenous peoples back to an Indigenous socially responsible stance. As those actions countered colonialism, they restored and

maintained what was the underlying responsibility of Indigenous peoples that one might argue exist independent of colonization. The significance of that position was that the response to colonization was also an aspect of Indigenous knowledge and worldview.

The Idle No More movement is likely the most tangible modern manifestation of Indigenous organization, raised consciousness and activism to emerge in the last forty years. Wilson (2015) calls Idle No More:

...an affirmation of Indigenous sovereignty and protection of land and water; a reaction to old and new colonial forms of oppression; a series of nationally and locally organized teach-ins, rallies, protests, and round dances; and a call for peaceful revolution – but always, at its core, it is a very contemporary political expression of old knowledge: that we, the land, the water, and all living creatures, are related and, as relatives, we are meant to love and care for each other. (p. 255-256)

Though instigated by contemporary actions of government and industry, "Idle No More is ... a culmination of the historical and contemporary legacies emerging from colonization and violence throughout North America and world" (The Kino-nda-niimi Collective, 2014, p. 21). The will and strength of Indigenous peoples globally merged with the "...technological tools to represent ourselves and our perspectives on the movement and broadcast those voices throughout Canada and the world..." (The Kino-nda-niimi Collective, 2014, p. 25) and created unprecedented opportunity for diverse Indigenous peoples to stand their ground and reframe Indigenous rights and advocacy from an Indigenous perspective. As an act of resurgence, it was the concept of relatedness that fostered a collective "... responsibility for the well-being of each other and the lands, water, and earth that we rely on and that sustain life" (Wilson, 2014, p. 328).

The movement of Idle No More was not an isolated series of actions, though, but was indicative of the evolution of Indigenous activism exerting influence in a whole host of non-traditional contexts. In the education sector, the rise of "...land based pedagogy... offer[s] a way of fostering individual and collective empowerment for students by re-embedding them in the land-connected social relationships that the settler-colonialism, through education and otherwise, sought to destroy" (Wildcat, McDonald, Irlbacher-Fox & Coulthard, 2014, p. iii). Further, "it is argued that... (Indigenous and place-based education) ...brings teachers in relation with situated Indigenous knowledges, as well as Indigenous-non-Indigenous histories and contemporary realities that emerge from interconnected relationships formed in and through place... (Madden, 2015, p. 11). Pedagogies of place offer a venue for the gift of Indigenous knowledge and life-ways to positively influence the trajectory of society removed from the importance of land in the equation of life as well as highlight the efforts of Indigenous peoples to retain and proliferate knowledges and worldviews that help to sustain the earth and humanity. Contemporary manifestations of the resurgence of Indigenous knowledge are the latest in a continuum of advancements achieved by Indigenous communities and championed by Indigenous academics and activists as they steadfastly hold to the teachings that have sustained Indigenous peoples for millennia.

### **A Changed Research Landscape**

As Battiste (2005a) recognized, Indigenous post-colonial literature was "...not about rejecting all theory or research of Western knowledge. It is about creating a new space where Indigenous peoples' knowledge, identity and future is calculated into the global and contemporary equation" (p. 225). Literature advanced by contemporary

Indigenous researchers positioned Indigenous knowledge in spiritually and contextually-bound holistic interrelatedness. Local and international evidence in the literature described patterns as they wove throughout descriptions of the presence of decolonization and Indigenous knowledge in experience and the effects of those concepts in society.

Battiste (2005b) advocated for the emergence of a body of literature that originated in Indigenous knowledge. Decolonization theory associated with contemporary Indigenous researchers emerged as a touchstone to ground the dynamic response to colonialism. She wrote, “Post-colonial theory helps us unravel the colonial mentality that has endangered and subjugated peoples around the world. It raises our consciousness, develops our resistance, and helps us engage in transformative action” (p. 121). Despite operating in a sometimes-hostile environment, contemporary Indigenous researchers have contributed to the development of a response that maintained responsibility to Indigenous communities while carving out a foothold in Western academia.

Smith (2000) reported the experience of New Zealand’s Maori in their reclaiming effort. She reflected on the return of Maori research in that:

One of the challenges for Maori researchers working in this context has been to retrieve some space. First, to convince Maori people of the value of research for Maori; second, to convince the various fragmented but powerful *Pakeha* [non-Indigenous] research communities of the need for greater Maori involvement in research; third, to develop approaches to and ways of carrying out research that takes into account, without being limited by, the legacies of previous research in the parameters of both previous and current approaches to research. What is now referred to as Kaupapa Maori research is an attempt to retrieve that space and to achieve these general aims. (p. 225)

The literature reported on the engineering of infrastructure to facilitate a resurgence of Indigenous knowledge within the context of decolonizing research. Smith



(1999) described decolonizing methodologies that illustrated the restorative approach to Indigenous-controlled research. Methodologies such as claiming, restoring, discovering and sharing created a continuum that illuminated a pathway for the proliferation of Indigenous knowledge. The prospects surfaced in the liberating action of naming Indigenous heritage achieve what Jimenez Estrada (2005) said, "...pertains to applying the culturally-situated visions, understandings and directions necessary to engage in processes that ultimately facilitate and promote the well-being of indigenous communities in a holistic manner" (p. 44). Jimenez Estrada (2005) proposed a culturally based research methodology within the metaphor of the tree of life or *Ceiba* (p. 44). She applied this methodology to, "...remembering the teachings contained in the oral stories that elders and community members hold..." (p. 44). That knowledge, situated in Indigenous origins, moved along a continuum of interpretation and application under Indigenous terms that dismissed Western paradigms and methodology for the traditional, language and culture-based tools that are manifest through Indigenous metaphors. Jimenez Estrada (2005) adopted the tree of life as a metaphor that encompassed all good aspects of life and avoided the division prevalent in Western research (p. 45). The "...Ceiba encompasses understandings of the Four Sacred Directions in the Wheel of Life" (p. 46). Jimenez Estrada (2005) described the:

...concept of a unified dichotomy, not in the Western sense of binaries that divide entities but rather as dualities that highlight the interconnectedness of opposite energy forces, highlights the manner in which research needs to balance the information that is disclosed with a way to make the information useful for the lives of the members of the participating community. (p. 47)

The use of familiar metaphors to take back control of Indigenous heritage (Smith, 1999) framed the mandate for the protection of Indigenous heritage in a manner that inspired

Indigenous participation. Whether at an international or local level, there are common elements that shape the metaphor and create a powerful tool for the protection of Indigenous heritage.

A hopeful example of a mechanism to support and protect Indigenous knowledge, derived from Indigenous and non-Indigenous participation, are the *Ethical Guidelines for Research* of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (Royal Commission on Aboriginal peoples, 1994). Battiste and Henderson (2000) commented, “The 1996 Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples ... is a defining moment in the life of Canada” (p. 273). It was not simply the scope of the commission and the report but the fact that the, “...report is unique, since it is a cooperative effort between leading Canadian and Aboriginal academics, governments, and politicians” (p. 273). Battiste and Henderson noted that “the commission[’s perspective that] Aboriginal people should define the content of their Indigenous knowledge and cultural heritage” (p. 274) is an example of a shared perspective regarding Indigenous knowledge and heritage.

The tenacious response by Indigenous researchers and communities to the diminishing influences on Indigenous knowledge changed the research landscape by instituting Indigenous knowledge, worldviews and life-ways. That is not to say that the battle has been won but, as evidenced in the literature, the trajectory of Indigenous knowledge are more hopeful as a result of recognition of its existence, utility and genius.

### **Access Protocols**

The pursuit of decolonization and the resulting resurgence of Indigenous knowledge are the contextual precursors for access protocols to Indigenous knowledge. The literature coalesced around issues of worldview, relationship and access. That body

of literature was useful in structuring an inquiry that rested on its ability to demonstrate a respectful motivation for inquiry. The integrity of the inquiry is in the integrity of the research act. Smith (2005) noted:

... research ethics is not just the body of historical "hiccups" and their legal solutions. It is a study of how societies, institutions, disciplines, and individuals authorize, described, settle, and rule. It is a study of historical imperialism, racism, and patriarchy and the new formations of the systems in contemporary relations to power. It is a study of how humans fail and succeed at treating each other with respect. (p. 101)

That rich description of the context of Indigenous research ethics alluded to why the knowledge and practices that are manifest in Indigenous research protocols are such rich practices informed by decades of resistance and renewal (Battiste, 2000).

Smith (2005) reflected:

For indigenous and other marginalized communities, research ethics is at a very basic level about establishing, maintaining, and nurturing reciprocal and respectful relationships, not just among people as individuals, as collectives, and as members of communities, and with humans who live in and with other entities in their environment. The abilities to enter pre-existing relationships; to build, maintain, and nurture relationships; and to strengthen connectivity are important research skills in the indigenous arena. They require critical sensitivity and reciprocity of spirit by a researcher. (p. 97)

Relationship underpins Indigenous research protocols. Without relationship, "... what is missing from the plethora of books, journals, and articles produced by non-Indians about Indians is "the passion from within and the authority to ask new and different questions based on history and experiences as indigenous people" (Swisher, 1998, p. 193, in Bishop, 2005, p. 113). Wilson (2008) advanced the concept of "...relational accountability [that] ...means that the [research] methodology needs to be based in a community context (relational) and has to demonstrate respect, reciprocity and responsibility (be accountable as it is put into action)" (p. 99). He brings community

wisdom and protocols to bear in articulating a research methodology so familiar to Indigenous communities that it predates the arrival of Western institutional research in Indigenous communities. Latulippe (2015) described relational accountability as “...center[ing] the relationships and responsibilities researchers carry with respect to Indigenous lands, peoples, and systems of knowledge and governance” (p. 1). She described that:

...researchers fulfill their roles and responsibilities through their methodology, which is described simply as ‘the building of more relations’ or constructing more ‘knots’ in the web of relationships that produce knowledge (Wilson, 2008, p. 79). Relationships uncovered or constructed through research methodology coalesce into theory. (Latulippe, 2015, p. 5)

An epistemology of relationship contributes to authentic knowledge generation useful for non-Indigenous peoples to invest in Indigenous stories and histories, just as Indigenous people use research arising out of relationship for their own liberating endeavours.

Bishop (2005) stated, “Researchers can participate in a process that facilitates the development in people of a sense of themselves as agentic and of having an authoritative voice. This is not a result of the researcher ‘allowing’ this to happen or ‘empowering’ participants; it is the function of the cultural context within which the research participants are positioned, negotiate, and conduct the research” (p. 123). Smith (2005) added, "This shift in position, from seeing ourselves as passive victims of all research to seeing ourselves as activists engaging in counterhegemonic struggle over research, is significant" (p. 87).

Another consideration was the expression of Indigenous heritage that spoke to the system of protocols, methodologies and interpretive elements that described pathways to actualize the teachings within the knowledge. Those are the aspects that are negotiated

between community and researcher and the elements that Indigenous communities are reclaiming. Indigenous communities are taking responsibility with the knowledge that "to acquire freedom in the decolonized and dealienated order, the colonized must break their silence and struggled to retake possession of their humanity and identity" (Henderson, 2000a, p. 249). Just as the Western empirical thought was limiting and colonization perpetuating, re-emerged Indigenous paradigms put structures in place that have the opposite effect so that the "restoring [of] Aboriginal worldviews and languages ...realiz[e] Aboriginal solidarity and power (Henderson, 2000a, p. 252).

Accepted and expected knowledge access protocols meant that "it is essential for researchers to examine the origins of current thinking, learn about the tensions inherent in various approaches and beliefs and how other researchers have attempted similar issues..." (Latham, 2004, p. 106). Critical voices within the academy have exposed that "research ethics is often much more about institutional and professional regulations and codes of conduct than it is about the needs, aspirations, or worldviews of 'marginalized and vulnerable' communities" (Smith, 2005, p. 96). There was an expectation that:

... research must serve and inform the political liberation struggle of indigenous peoples. It is also a struggle for development, for rebuilding relationships and governance structures, for strengthening social and cultural institutions, for protecting and restoring environments, and for revitalizing language and culture. (Smith, 2005, p.89)

Renewed access protocols were as much for Indigenous researchers who must navigate their role as brokers of community knowledge as for the non-Indigenous researchers negotiating access. Indigenous communities typically experienced research as being the object of research and as being defined by outside experts. They have alternate ways of knowing about themselves and their environment and those ways have

survived colonization. Those ways “... provide... access to a different epistemology, an alternative vision of society, an alternative ethics for human conduct” (Smith, 2005, p. 101).

## **Leadership and Policy**

### **Indigenous Educational Leadership**

The *subject* within this research is the educational leader. It was important, then, to address leadership to the extent that the leadership context could help to provide understanding of the role and position of educational leaders in an Indigenous education context. There were four nested considerations that I briefly touch upon in elaborating this context. I begin with an overview of common leadership traits associated with Indigenous leadership. Some entry-point studies used the traits of Indigenous leaders to discuss Indigenous educational leadership. Those traits were typically more generic in nature. A more extensive discussion regarding Indigenous educational leadership occurred within the context of Indigenous leadership traits. Those studies looked for substance in Indigenous contexts and communities by anchoring leadership traits to Indigenous worldview to evidence the Indigenous aspect of Indigenous leadership traits. That literature yielded a rich Indigenous leadership profile. I then provide a brief overview of the theoretical Indigenous leadership context with a focus on social justice. Finally, I provide an overview of an applied leadership context that is also useful in orienting to an Indigenous leadership context. That context relates contemporary educational leadership orientations that may be useful in contextualizing Indigenous educational leadership.

**Common Leadership Traits.** A small body of literature examined Indigenous leadership through common leadership traits. That literature used an Indigenous context to attribute leadership qualities to Indigenous leaders in practice or as an ideal. Jules (1999) *Native Indian Leadership* was an example of this type of contribution to the field. Jules addressed leadership in a “Native Indian Context” (p. 43) by reporting a predisposition to characteristics such as shared decision-making, personal charisma, integrity or leading by example. It was difficult to discern whether that approach to describing the qualities of Indigenous leadership identified characteristics associated with Indigenous leaders or whether those characteristics were generalizable to a broad spectrum of leadership.

Jules (1999) provided a useful overview of the various phases of Indigenous education as a backdrop to an Indigenous leadership dialogue. Jules’ most important contribution came with her portrayal of three Indigenous leaders and their perspectives on Indigenous leadership. Those leaders emphasized leadership traits such as vision, action or commitment. While each of those traits was important to Indigenous leadership, there was no evidence that those leadership characteristics were unique to Indigenous leadership.

Muskego (1995) similarly approached Indigenous leadership from a perspective of qualities of effectiveness. While issues like a command of a First Nations language were deemed important, those qualities were subordinate to more common leadership traits such as being people-oriented and flexible. Those qualities were more of a reflection on the educational context than specifically Indigenous educational leaders. Still, Muskego created a solid connection between a community and its educational

leader in an Indigenous context. While the value of leadership may not be unique to an Indigenous context, those studies identified value for leadership qualities in an Indigenous context.

**Indigenous Leadership Traits.** In contrast to Jules (1999) contribution to an Indigenous leadership dialogue, Washington (2004) illustrated Indigenous leadership through traditional concepts of her *Sliammon* people. That was an example of Indigenous leadership literature that delved more deeply into Indigenous community influences and used local language and concepts to portray a composite of Indigenous leadership. Washington addressed the various manifestations of Indigenous leadership as influenced by external forces such as an Indian Act (1985) imposed governance structure, Western expectations of leadership and a variety of social influences. Still, Washington illustrated leadership qualities commensurate with her Coast Salish community and anchored in their spiritual-cultural beliefs and traditions. Most importantly, Washington offered a framework to reclaim traditional leadership paradigms within a new context. That framework was based on the Sliammon core values in their ancestral *Ta'ow* (Washington, 2004, p. 597). Her proposal to return to traditional paradigms in leadership provided an excellent insight into Washington's (2004) mission. She advocated for retention of "...democracy, equality and transparency while maintaining ... core values and principles" (Washington, 2004, p. 597).

Makokis (2001) employed teachings from Cree Elders in her look at Indigenous leadership. Her study was another example of community-specific teachings as Makokis focused on the teachings of Elders from the Saddle Lake First Nation in Alberta, Canada. The study was deeply anchored in traditional spiritual-cultural beliefs that offered a



counter to leadership qualities couched in a dominant capitalist, male oriented leadership paradigm. While Makokis advocated for “determined and visionary leadership ..., which will cooperate and collaborate with the people,” (p. 217) she grounded her recommendations in Cree natural law, language, customs and treaties.

Ottmann, in her 2005 doctoral dissertation, looked at First Nations leadership development in Saskatchewan. Her study was a thorough look at the leadership influences available within an Indigenous leadership context and the varied influences on her study participants. Ottmann’s work illustrated both the amalgam that is the context of influence on Indigenous leaders as well as the strength of the influence of Indigenous heritage that resonated despite a blended context. Studies of Indigenous leadership traits that considered Indigenous context produced a perspective on Indigenous leadership as a tool in the furtherance of Indigenous knowledge, goals and aspirations. The inseparability of leader and context insisted on the value of community in the role of leader.

Gladstone and Pepion (2016) skillfully connected traditional Blackfeet leadership with contemporary leadership skills. They described that:

Traditional leadership within the Blackfeet nations is guided by the bundle concept, circle process, which provides a ‘...connection to traditional controls for social order’ (Crowshoe, 1994, p. 5). In the Blackfeet way of knowing these rules of order is the basis for conceptualizing the relationship between people and their environment. (p. 15)

The through-line of traditional leadership traits manifest in contemporary contexts contributes to leadership able to inform future direction with the values and practices relevant and meaningful to Blackfeet people. As Gladstone and Pepion (2016) offered, “Preserving the traditional worldview is important for asserting self-determination, the

right for an Indigenous culture to persist and thrive within by its own values, standards, and custom” (p. 16).

**Theoretical Leadership Context.** In addition to examining the context of Indigenous leadership, it was important to consider the context in which Indigenous educational leadership participates. Leadership paradigms are not typically evident in educational organizations and are certainly not common across the education spectrum. Saskatchewan Indigenous educational leaders, though, lead in an environment of advocacy given the climate of race-based inequity prevalent in Saskatchewan. Leadership theory from equity, social justice or improvement perspectives represent leadership aimed at advancing a minority position while following a chronological representation of leadership phases in Saskatchewan as they relate to Indigenous participation in publicly funded education.

Early efforts to achieve equity in education in Saskatchewan were largely advanced under the banner of community education. Community education was the predominant influence on publicly funded education in Saskatchewan for many years. Much of the education policy between approximately 1980 and the mid 90’s included a community education perspective. Social justice in educational leadership also exerted influence on the leadership milieu of Indigenous education. A social justice paradigm is effective in exposing contradictions in educational trends and highlighting the needs of minority communities within public education (Marshall, 2004, p. 6). Social justice discourse provided an entry point to a decolonizing paradigm as an effective tool to “...unravel the colonial mentality that has endangered and subjugated peoples around the world” (Battiste, 2005a, p. 121). No matter what depth of Indigenous worldview an

Indigenous educational leader might bring, by virtue of their advocacy for a colonized population, their leadership endeavour is situated within a contested context and the pursuit of justice and equity.

Indigenous education is often characterized by an emphasis on learning or community deficit. That approach prompts a compensatory response to the needs of Indigenous learners, which has the potential to become the dominant narrative for Indigenous education. Socializing Indigenous students into an environment that can further their marginalization is a potential pitfall of Indigenous educational leadership. Evans, (2007) in her study of themes associated with school leaders in contexts characterized by race and demographic change, found that:

The importance of school leaders' sense making lies in the assumptions that the meanings they make of educational issues and situations determine how they define and respond to them via their actions and decisions on school programs, policies, and practices. (p. 160)

Social justice is a paradigm that challenges silence about difference and contests dominant perceptions by introducing moral discourse to dispel the association of difference and deficit (Shields, 2004). The school context became part of the space used to identify and name limitations. A social justice orientation acknowledges economic and social factors that contribute to subordination of minorities, illuminates the dilemma of promoting school success and societal participation among a marginalized population and offers considerations that the education sector may adopt in resolving those tensions. That approach acknowledges difference and works with it rather than "... reifying it or pathologizing it" (Shields, 2004, p. 113).

Marshall (2004) recognized that "... traditional policy, leadership training, licensure, and selection processes for school leaders often provide only token, isolated

stabs at inequities or see them as management challenges" (p. 6). Social justice challenges those presumptions and broadens the role of school leaders in a manner that makes their role integral to the achievement of social justice. The role is not ambivalent but is an integral part of resolution. Shields (2004) contended, "...socially just learning is embedded in deeply democratic ideas and in relational pedagogy (p. 115). Shields (2004) advocated for the need for critical dialogue among the students in relation to their experiences (p. 118) and among educators as a part of their contribution to a socially just learning community (p. 122). Shields (2004) stated, "... we need to open our curriculum [formal, informal, and hidden] and create spaces in which all children's lived experiences may be both reflected and critiqued in the context of learning" (p. 123). Shields' work offered a framework for transformative educational leaders to promote social justice. The framework centered on initiating moral dialogue to challenge beliefs and build relationships. Shields claimed that despite exhaustive school reform, the singular success of the status quo has not been challenged.

Indigenous educational leadership may be cast into myriad contexts, some of which are adopted by choice. Advocating for recognition of strengths within a deficit-based context, though, and challenging success reserved for the status quo are characteristic of Indigenous educational leadership. Considering Indigenous educational leadership, pursuing social justice is a probable characteristic.

**Applied Leadership Context.** There is a prolific dialogue regarding contemporary educational leadership. That dialogue, presented in its entirety, is beyond the scope of this study. I have chosen, though, to provide a glimpse of emergent themes in educational leadership as both context and as an illustration of alignment with previous

themes. Alignment was evident in educational leadership that moved beyond management issues to leadership with moral purpose. The ease of access to knowledge, the digital context and the loss of stability associated with earlier generations offered specific challenges to the contemporary education sector. In North America, the focus on improvement, accountability and outcomes also posed challenges. In Saskatchewan, considerations related to changing demographics and the pursuit of equity of outcome challenged educational leaders. Fullan (2006) described that the goals of education must encompass broader social goals such as the pursuit of justice, health, well-being and economic development. Schools become a significant catalyst to shape society to fit a changing social context.

Despite leadership challenges, education may have emerged into a new era of definition. There was suggestion that publicly funded education was entering an era of *post-standardization* and that the role of innovation and change was the new constant (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009). Dialogue regarding school improvement was expanding its purposeful approach to now look at broader social goals. The contemporary leadership context is a significant departure from a limited debate as to whether leadership is inherent or learned. Educational leadership is, more than ever, shaped by research, dialogue and responsiveness to changing community conditions.

The broadening of considerations for educational leaders to include social goals is characteristic of a contemporary leadership focus. Elmore (2008) argued that "...leaders have to have some systematic understanding of the various ways developmental processes work..." (p. 56). He provided a view of leadership as an acutely human enterprise; constantly investing in the capacity of people at all levels to master and lead

the improvement of instructional practice. A developmental paradigm established ongoing processes of capacity building that are integrated into the system instead of occupying sidebars that are re-visited, on occasion, when a leader shifts from leading to growing. Continual growth and development is a contemporary currency. Elmore (2008) argued:

Leadership of improvement, if it is to result in the improvement of quality and performance at scale, must be conceived as a practice – a collection of patterned actions, based on a body of knowledge, skill, and habits of mind that can be objectively defined, taught, and learned – rather than a set of personal attributes. As improvement advances, leadership refracts; it ceases to follow the lines of positional authority and begins to follow the distribution of knowledge and skill in the organization. (p. 26)

That view of educational leadership offered a glimpse of the technical-contextual characteristics of leadership. That recognition bridged from leadership characteristics to the characteristic of leadership in education. It was crucial to consider that despite what Indigenous educational leaders knew and did, they exercised their leadership within an ever-professionalizing context, yet each leader translated organizational imperatives within a local context.

Hopkins (2008) argued that “...resolving a technical problem is a managerial issue; tackling adaptive challenges requires leadership. Often we try to solve technical problems with adaptive processes, or more commonly force technical solutions onto adaptive problems” (p. 25). The development of sets of common responses must give way to the development of common characteristics of leaders. Those characteristics are then tailored and fit to changing contexts and emerging concerns. Distributed leadership fosters leadership that is responsive and responsible for an entire system, maximizing

growth based on an extensive network of leaders. Hargreaves, Halasz and Pont, (2008) argued:

The key challenge of school improvement today, then, is for school administrators to become leaders who develop and raise high level achievement by working with, learning from and influencing the behaviours of others within and beyond their schools. Instead of being managers who implement policy, school administrators will increasingly need to become leaders of their schools who can also exercise leadership in the environment beyond their schools, and articulate the connection between the two. The educational leader of the future, therefore, will increasingly be a system leader as well as a school leader. (p. 72)

Hopkins (2008) added, “System leaders are those ... who are willing to shoulder system leadership roles, who care about and work for the success of other schools as well as their own” (p. 22). A balanced technical-community response to educational improvement among a network of leaders pursuing improvement at scale was an important contextual consideration for this study. As has been demonstrated, Indigenous educational leaders work to advance social change. The educational leadership milieu is increasingly oriented to this mandate. This view of educational leadership is now more pronounced and benefits from contemporary language that explicates, at scale, what Indigenous educational leaders experience, know and do.

### **Indigenous Participation in Policy Development**

The complex policy context associated with Indigenous issues in Canada has roots in a liberal rights agenda and emerged into a context with a greater Indigenous influence (Turner, 2006). The Indigenization of Canadian public policy was fostered by decisions of the Canadian courts favourable to Indigenous issues (Henderson, 2006). Prefacing those emerging policy influences, I explore the development of policy formulation with a greater emphasis on community participation. From that broadened policy context, the evolution of an Indigenous policy context gave rise to an Indigenous

philosophical orientation in policy development in Canada. That emerging policy development context illustrated at a macro level what the research-participants may have encountered in their experience.

**Policy Development Context.** Policy development is reflective of the larger socio-political context (Stone, 2002). Laforest and Phillips (2007) argued:

By facilitating the direct and active involvement of the citizenry outside of the mechanisms of the representative democracy...governments are contorting old assumptions and are, in effect, redesigning the institutional links between the citizens and the state, thus remaking the policy process in some fundamental ways. (p. 67)

That view on the evolution of the involvement of citizens and its influence on the policy process was an important signal in the reduction of the influence of the bureaucracy in favour of a "...model of deliberative democracy that emerged in the 1990's [that] starts from the premise that political representation is not enough; active participation by citizens is as important as having their interests represented by third parties" (Laforest & Phillips, 2007, p. 67). That orientation suggested a relationship between government and citizens that was fair, just and trusted. Those characteristics may not be typical of the relationship between Indigenous Canadians and the state but that contemporary orientation to policy development was crucial to examine as a contextual factor.

The position on citizen engagement, too, was anchored in a larger philosophical orientation. Laforest and Phillips (2007) stated, "The trend of the 1990s toward a preference for the involvement of individuals signaled a shift in the purpose of public input; to add experiential knowledge, often through the sharing of personal stories, rather than to provide technical expertise" (p. 75). Laforest and Phillips identified a twofold phenomenon with a greater emphasis on the individual and its purpose in eliciting



personal stories. Whether government motivation for personal policy input preceded an orientation to individualism was debatable but the net result was a greater deference to the individual. An effect of the move to individualism in policy influence was that “...citizen engagement was better equipped to produce interest articulation than interest aggregation. The state provided the venues for claims making by individuals, and often the mobilization of interests in the first place by determining who was invited to participate” (Laforest & Phillips, 2007, p. 75). For the purposes of this study, there was a complex threefold policy-development consideration that included an emphasis on the individual, often largely at the initiative of government and in a larger societal context where Indigenous voice was assumed to be marginalized.

Abu-Laban (2007) addressed the place of minorities within the evolving policy development context. He stated, “...the dominant examination of governance and its consequences by political scientists has tended to be shaped by a selective attention to history and in particular the variety of historical narratives that exist in contemporary Canada” (p. 137). Abu-Laban (2007) illustrated two telling complexities of policy development in a context of Indigenous-minority participation. He suggested:

First, though political scientists in Canada have paid increasing attention in recent years to multiculturalism as an ideal and, to a lesser extent, as a policy, attending to public policy in a way that takes seriously ethnicity, language, and processes of realization can and must go further. Second, attending to public policy more fully requires political scientists to explicitly acknowledge the legacy of colonialism permeating all social relations, with potential reverberations even in the present. Only then will we have the potential to begin dealing with the significance of multiple, hybrid, and even shifting identities, as well as with the danger of essentialism. (p. 139)

Given that awareness of the trickle-in of recognition for marginalized voice in public policy, Abu-Laban (2007) advocated for continued acknowledgement of “...the idea that

public policy involves both what a state does and does not do...” (p. 140). In the Canadian context, what a state does not do, in relation to Indigenous participation in public policy is as crucial for consideration as what it does. Abu-Laban (2007) claimed that “if Canada’s formation as a settler colony is acknowledged, and the impact of colonialism historically and contemporaneously is addressed, a different way of conceptualizing social relations and the significance of state policies and non-policies may emerge” (p. 143). That analysis suggested that “...despite the growing body of work on Aboriginal politics, colonialism as a frame for understanding Canada’s history and contemporary social relations is not commonly engaged within the empirical work done in the political science discipline” (Abu-Laban, 2007, p. 144). Abu-Laban (2007) claimed that “if we take colonialism as a starting point for understanding all social relations in Canada, a more explicit consideration of history as well as the variety of historical narratives that exist in contemporary Canada would emerge in sharper relief” (p. 144). That stark statement positioned the contemporary Canadian policy development context in an arena influenced by its contextual markers. As Canada is a colonized context (Ralston-Saul, 2008), inclusive policy development must engage that reality and address colonialism as a contextual factor in policy development.

Abele (2007) argued that “...to date, traditional knowledge is welcome mainly where social, physical, or environmental disturbances affect Indigenous populations, or where a policy directly involves Indigenous peoples as a group” (p. 233). Abele cautioned the limitations of situating Indigenous participation as traditional participation. He suggested that “...without the concept of “modernity,” it is not possible to make sense of “traditional.” The concept of traditional knowledge is a modern artifact” (Abele, 2007,

p. 234). That recognition broadened the scope of Indigenous participation in policy development by suggesting that “shared interpretations are built of epistemological premises, ethical principles, empirical generalizations, human experiences, and collective reflection and analysis of all of this, over generations” (Abele, 2007, p. 234). Abele (2007) broadened the scope of Indigenous influence and, while recognizing “...respect and control...” as the mediators of traditional knowledge in public policy, acknowledged the complexity of potential contributions of traditional knowledge and its role in creating genuinely representative public policy in a colonized context (p. 240).

As progressive and inclusive public policy paradigms emerge, White, Atkinson, Berdahl & McGrane (2015) argued that "...negativity towards policies that favour Aboriginals is rooted in prejudice and ... antipathy towards government interventions of any kind" (p. 295). Ultimately, the effect of public policy on Indigenous peoples in Canada will be mediated by the will and attitude of the polis as much as emerging public policy trends and issues. White et al. (2015) stated, "... as long as there are strong negative attitudes towards Aboriginal policies, regardless of their origins, governments are likely to be cautious in their approach" (p. 302).

**Liberalism.** Liberalism was a dominant force in a rights agenda in Canada (Turner, 2006). As I noted in 2008 (Martell, 2008) representative of that orientation was Kymlicka and Marin’s (1999) perspective that:

... weakened and oppressed cultures can regain and enhance their richness, if they are given the appropriate conditions. There is no reason to think that weakened Indigenous communities, for example, cannot become vibrant and diverse cultures, drawing on their traditional culture while incorporating the best of the modern world, if given the requisite preconditions. (p. 140)

A liberal rights agenda may have served Canada's Indigenous population in some positive manner. Kymlicka's perspective on minority rights in Canada, and its limitations, was further explored by Schouls (2003). He identified that,

... Kymlicka...argues that the purported neutrality of universal individual rights obscures the fact that the integrity of minority cultural differences is often vulnerable to the decisions made by the dominant culture. In his view, democratic devices such as "one-person, one-vote" and "majority rule" can consistently work against minority cultures if majority cultures use these devices to outvote and outbid minorities for resources critical to their survival. This is a threat, Kymlicka says, that the dominant group need never face given its superior numbers. (p. 21)

Kymlicka's (1999) stance on the limitations of liberalism in a rights agenda, given the shortfalls of democracy to address minority issues, was crucial to consider in setting the stage for a post-liberal tradition vis-à-vis minority rights in Canada. Kymlicka's (1999) differentiation of Aboriginal rights from other minority rights was a crucial pre-cursor to the refinement of an Indigenous rights agenda in Canada. Kymlicka (1999) underpinned that recognition with his position that Aboriginal peoples constitute "...entirely distinct forms of culture, distinct 'civilizations,' rooted in a pre-modern way of life that needs protecting from the forces of modernization, secularization, urbanization, 'Westernization,' and so on (p. 289). That orientation, while potentially paternalistic, created a new branch of a Canadian rights agenda that fostered Indigenous perspective into public policy. Together with the significant policy drivers such as the Canadian Constitution and decisions of the courts (Henderson, 2006), the liberal tradition's influence loomed large in Canadian public policy development.

Kymlicka's (2003) primary contribution to the Indigenous policy context in Canada was his recognition of the changing purpose that underpinned policy development in that area. He acknowledged its original assimilative intent. In doing so,

he established reason for both the existence and shortcomings of the liberal tradition in minority and Indigenous public policy in Canada. Ultimately, Kymlicka (2003) found a change-context associated with Indigenous rights:

... including the repudiation of the assimilationist 1969 White Paper on Indian Policy, the Supreme Court's recognition of Aboriginal land title in the Calder decision, the revalidation of older treaties, the signing of new treaties, such as James Bay and Nunavut agreements with the Inuit and Cree, and constitutional entrenchment of Aboriginal rights in the 1982 Constitution. (p. 372)

Those change-influences were not absolute and while Abu-Laban (2007) recognized that “...theoretical work outside the liberal tradition which has engaged with the challenge of colonialism in considering multiculturalism (Day, 2000; Mackey, 2002) has not attracted many followers within Canadian political science” (p. 141); the die of change is cast.

**Indigenous Jurisprudence.** Henderson (2006) evidenced the emergence of an Indigenous rights policy context suggested previously. As I noted in 2008, (Martell, 2008) the three primary characteristics of Henderson’s position on Aboriginal rights included the relationship with the Crown, the 1982 Constitution of Canada’s recognition of Aboriginal rights and Aboriginal participation in defining Aboriginal rights.

Henderson identified constitutionalism as a counter to colonial politics and law and that the constitutional position on Aboriginal rights compelled governments to be motivated by the Constitution (p. 69). Henderson identified that:

The Court has recognized that Aboriginal rights are constitutional rights derived from pre-contact First Nations legal teachings - teachings that structure and inform First Nations jurisprudences and legal and political orders, while treaty rights are derived from the Aboriginal orders’ consensual transnational agreements with the British sovereign. (p. 97)

It was that recognition that endorsed a unique Indigenous foundation of rights and opened the door to definition of rights by Indigenous peoples. Albeit from a different platform,

Henderson (2006), as did Kymlicka (2003), noted, "It is this fact, and this fact above all others, which separates aboriginal peoples from all other minority groups in Canadian society and which mandates their special legal, and now constitutional, status" (p. 60). Further, "the Court has acknowledged that sui generis First Nations jurisprudences and orders are inherent to First Nations orders or societies" (Henderson, 2006, p. 62). He identified the contributions of culture, language and practice of an Aboriginal worldview as defining jurisprudence that has been "...developed across countless generations by Elders, knowledge keepers, performers, and storytellers through their covenants, worldviews, experiences, and accumulated wisdom..." (Henderson, 2006, p. x). Indigenous jurisprudence established a new platform for Indigenous participation in Canadian public policy that was supported by Indigenous realizations of un-yielded Indigenous rights.

**Contemporary Indigenous Rights.** A liberal oriented Indigenous rights position can be challenged by the view that "the liberalism reflected in the White Paper assumed that the individual is the fundamental moral unit in developing a theory of justice and that to deviate from the sanctity of moral individualism is to lead justice off its rightful path" (Turner, 2006, p. 28). The liberalist tradition was *answered back* (Smith, 1999) by Aboriginal Canadians who staked a claim in their cultures, languages, Treaties and Aboriginal rights. Turner (2006) noted that "...many Aboriginal peoples...do not view their rights as somehow legitimated by the Canadian state. Rather, many Aboriginal peoples understand the political relationship as one of 'nation to nation'" (p. 4). Turner argued, "If Aboriginal peoples want to assert that they possess different world views, and that these differences ought to matter in the political relationship between Aboriginal

peoples and the Canadian state, they will have to engage the Canadian state's legal and political discourses in more effective ways" (p. 5). Turner claimed, "Understanding Indigenous philosophy, engaging Western philosophies ... and looking at the philosophy and history of Western philosophical tradition will constitute a critical indigenous philosophy (Turner, 2006). The critical Indigenous philosophy that captured the emerging sense making of Indigenous rights in Canada by Indigenous people characterized an emerging Aboriginal rights agenda in Canada. Turner best captured the way forward in his comments that:

In view of Aboriginal understandings of their political sovereignty, justice demands that contemporary and future policy makers include Aboriginal voices when drafting legislation and policies that affect the welfare of Aboriginal peoples. In other words, a robust account of Aboriginal rights must include greater Aboriginal participation. (p. 58)

Coulthard (2014) advanced a stance in Indigenous rights that exists independent of recognition-based rights legitimized by the state "...that claim to recognize and accommodate the political autonomy, land rights, and cultural distinctiveness of Indigenous nations within the settler states that now encase them" (p. 2). Further, he argued, "...Canadian settler-colonialism remains structurally oriented around achieving the same power effect it sought in the pre-1969 period: the disposition of Indigenous peoples of their lands and self determining authority" (Coulthard, 2014, p. 25). The appropriate response to recognition-based Indigenous rights, according to Coulthard (2014), is to "... 'turn away' from the assimilative reformism of the liberal recognition approach and to instead build our national liberation efforts on the revitalization of 'traditional' political values and practices" (p. 154).

Alcantara and Spicer (2016) add to the discourse, "Rather than viewing themselves as stakeholders or junior governments, ...Aboriginal communities should be treated as full and equal partners in the Federation, operating on a nation-to-nation basis with the Crown" (p. 184). While this protestation has been made for some time, the assertion has gained strength as Indigenous "...scholars argue federal and provincial governments must fundamentally restructure their institutions and ideas to embrace an intergovernmental policymaking dynamics that is more respectful and accommodating of Aboriginal rights, title, and interests (RCAP, 1994)" (Alcantara & Spicer, 2016, p. 186-187). Alfred (2015) is at the forefront of advocacy for an Indigenous approach to recognition of Indigenous rights as is evident in his assertion:

If colonization were a process that could be framed simply in legal terms – the erasure of our names from the map, the denial of our laws, the control of our resources – then we could foresee a resolution of colonization through the resurgence of our nation and the reclamation of these things. (Alfred, 2015, p. 3)

Alfred's (2015) hopeful analysis is that "there is a whole school of indigenous scholarship emerging around the theme of indigenous resurgence, where a critical view of the decolonization process as it has been manifested in Canadian society is a main thrust" (p. 6).

Indigenous participation in policy development is a developing area. Three of the most significant fronts are unpacking the liberal-influenced history of Indigenous rights in Canada, the pursuit of Indigenous rights influenced by Indigenous worldview and concepts and contemporary manifestations of Indigenous rights. No one offers the complete picture of Indigenous rights in Canada. Each, though, sheds light on that complex area. Understanding the complexity as well as foundational and emergent themes helped to understand the context in which the study participants practiced.



## Consultation

### The Duty to Consult

Attempting to portray an understanding of the Duty to Consult entailed two potential pathways. One was the inspiring impact that the notion of consultation with Indigenous peoples had on me. I have accounted for this inspiration throughout the context of this study. The other route of explanation was the complex legal history that resulted in a Supreme Court of Canada decision. I choose to forgo an attempt at an explanation of the Duty to Consult that would satisfy the legal community. Instead I present a basic understanding of the origin, content and implications of the Duty to Consult. Newman's (2009) *The Duty to Consult: New Relationships with Aboriginal Peoples* provides the significant content in this evolving area.

**Origin.** The decision referred to as the Duty to Consult are the result of "...a trilogy of cases in 2004 and 2005: The Haida Nation case, the Taku River Tlingit First Nation case, and the Mikisiw Cree First Nation case" (Newman, 2009, p. 9). The commonality that those cases considered were the actions of governments or their agents and their act or absence of consultation in relation to actions that had real or potential impacts on Aboriginal rights. In those cases, the rights under consideration were land and title rights. Specific to the *Haida Nation v. British Columbia* case (2004), the issue pertained to the government's transfer of a tree farm license to Weyerhaeuser; a large forestry company. As a result of a challenge by the Haida Nation to that transfer, "the Court held that the governments ought to have consulted with the Haida Nation prior to those actions, as the Crown was bound to act honourably in its relations with Aboriginal peoples" (Newman, 2009, p. 12).

Justice McLachlin, in the 2004 Haida Nation case, wrote:

This case is the first of its kind to reach this Court. Our task is the modest one of establishing a general framework for the duty to consult and accommodate...before Aboriginal title or rights have been decided. As this framework is applied, courts, in the age-old tradition of the common law, will be called on to fill in the details of the duty to consult and accommodate. (Newman, 2009, p. 23)

That statement presents the decision as a frame on which future decisions may come to rest. It was that opportunity that cast the Duty to Consult as a beginning rather than an end. The Supreme Court decision may have started out as an Indigenous land title decision but its implications were broad, indeed, even instigating this study.

**Content.** The content of the decision was delimited by the fact that "...the Court ... decided that the duty to consult is one owed specifically by governments" (Newman, 2009, p. 10) as it was anchored in the honour of the Crown. It was that characteristic that prompted consideration of ideals rather than minimum requirements. Newman (2009) wrote:

...judges must consider not just the determinate rules from prior cases but also the broader principles that these rules embody and instantiate. Only by developing, with appropriate prudence and modesty, a broader theory of the law is it possible to address previously unanswered questions within the law. (p. 15)

That speculative consideration was related to section 35(1) of the Canadian Constitution Act (1982) that recognized existing Aboriginal and Treaty Rights. Definition, then, was left to the courts (Newman, 2009). The Duty to Consult served as a significant catalyst to the definition of Aboriginal rights in Canada.

Newman (2009) identified five fundamental components of the Duty to Consult: (1) that it arose prior to proof of Aboriginal rights; (2) that it was easily triggered; (3) that its strength of application lie along a spectrum of possibilities rising parallel to the

potential implications of an absence of consultation; (4) that greater possible implications require a greater scope of consultation; and (5) that remedies can be applied when the duty to consult is not undertaken. That distillation by Newman of the complexities of the ruling is a significant benefit for those attempting to interpret the Duty to Consult.

Justice Binnie, in the Mikisiw case, wrote:

The duty to consult ... is triggered based on a knowledge element and an adverse effect element. The knowledge element is met when the Crown has actual or constructive knowledge of a potential Aboriginal rights or title claim or of an Aboriginal claim under a treaty. The adverse effect element is met when the Crown contemplates conduct that might adversely affect Aboriginal title, an Aboriginal right, or a treaty right. (Newman, 2009, p. 25)

The nature of the Duty to Consult anticipated power imbalance and compensated for those power imbalance by associating a responsibility *checklist* with the Crown. Justice McLachlin described in the Haida Nation case that “difficulties associated with the absence of proof and definition of claims are addressed by assigning appropriate content to the duty, not by denying the existence of a duty” (Newman, 2009, p. 28). Put another way, the Duty to Consult provided the arena in which to define Aboriginal rights rather than establish an *in or out* mentality that would promote decision-making outside of this context. Still, further delineation was provided by Slatter in the Alberta Court of Appeal as:

...legislative processes are not subject to the duty to consult; it would be “an unwarranted interference with the proper functioning of the House of Commons and the provincial Legislatures to require that they engage in any particular processes prior to the passage of legislation. (Newman, 2009, p. 31)

That application limitation did not detract from the *fair play* directive that defined the Duty to Consult.

**Implications.** The Duty to Consult, as has been illustrated, crafted the context in which Aboriginal rights in Canada might be defined. The gravity of that directive of the courts, though, suggested significant implications. Newman (2009) wrote that “these three cases have set Aboriginal rights in Canada, and Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relations, on a fundamentally different course than they were on before” (Newman, 2009, p. 9). He emphasized the potential impact of the Duty to Consult in his statement that “the duty to consult is of national importance for Canada in terms of the future directions of Aboriginal law and Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relations” (Newman, 2009, p. 11). Again, the impact of the Duty to Consult is significant as “it was precisely because the final shape of Aboriginal rights and title had not yet been established that it was important for governments to consult with Aboriginal community so as not to affect their interests detrimentally during the process of proving and resolving a claim” (Newman, 2009, p. 12).

Newman (2009) suggested that “what began with a simple tree farm license led to the need to understand a new legal framework in relation to Aboriginal rights, title, and treaty rights” (p. 14). Defining those rights now occurs within a context with new rules of engagement. Newman (2009) wrote, “...the honour of the Crown also embodies such related principles as that the Crown should not engage in “sharp dealings” in making or interpreting treaties, potentially suggesting a somewhat attenuated version of the content of the honour at stake” (Newman, 2009, p. 16). That curious reflection suggested that governments know and manipulate the nature of its dealings with Aboriginal peoples. Holding that curiosity up against *sharp dealings* in the decision removed the premise of neutrality or objectivity but confirmed that consultation and negotiation are always in a

contested context. That observation alone warrants the kind of strategizing on position that this research promotes. Newman (2009) characterized the decision as "...an adjustment of government conduct to reflect unresolved claims, as part of a reconciliation of prior Aboriginal occupation and current Crown sovereignty" (Newman, 2009, p. 19). That implied that conciliatory motivations underpin the Duty to Consult. If a conciliatory milieu genuinely ensconced the Duty to Consult, the implication would be that it related to a larger societal/contextual pursuit of reconciliation and honourable execution of responsibility.

Another important consideration of the Duty to Consult, and one that was inextricably related to the intent of this study, are issues of Indigenous community capacity. The decision recognized that consultation was enhanced in an egalitarian context and that "...the capacity to engage in consultation processes flowing from the duty to consult is a real issue in the context of some aboriginal communities' situations" (Newman, 2009, p. 38). It was important to realize that the arena was still the Canadian courts of law. The capacity of a great many Canadians and Canadian institutions may be weak in that arena. Capacity issues, though, must be recognized by Indigenous people as "...once notified of government action, aboriginal communities have a responsibility to identify rights claims potentially affected; failure to do so may preclude further consultation requirements" (Newman, 2009, p. 51). It was that onus to act on behalf of the community that inspired this research.

In the Saskatchewan context, there has been significant activity related to the definition and application of the Duty to Consult. Newman (2009) reported that the Duty to Consult guidelines that the Saskatchewan government introduced in 2006 were mostly

reliant on legal doctrine. That led, reported Newman, to dissatisfaction from the Indigenous community and others. Following the 2007 Saskatchewan provincial election, the new government initiated a consultation process to create more balanced consultation guidelines. That resulted in the Government of Saskatchewan (2010) *First Nations and Métis Consultation Policy Framework*. In addition, the Assembly of First Nations and individual communities have developed their own consultation policies. The activities of both government and Indigenous communities predict a vibrant dialogue and active definition of Aboriginal rights through exchange in consultation and the courts. Where this research is able to promote reflection on the nature and substance of consultation, there is potential to contribute to the exercise of both the honour of the Crown and the capacity of Indigenous peoples and communities.

### **Integrating Themes**

*kîkway ka osihtahk*. Improvisation does not imply a lack of preparedness or acting without a plan. On the contrary, improvisation lends itself to hyper preparedness where the actor can perform without a script as a result of a highly developed repertoire of skills. As the intent of this research was to illuminate the experience of Indigenous educational leadership, the intent of the literature review was to use the themes as *tracing dye* to recognize a context of emergence. The literature review affirmed context by describing the landscape that the participants traversed. The themes that constituted the literature review were the etymology, or even the kinship, of Indigenous educational leadership.

Those themes of the literature review presented as a litany or progression but were more useful as orbits completing a constellation of Indigenous educational

leadership. As the participants occupied their place in the world of Indigenous educational leadership, they were products of and contributors to the global effort for the protection and proliferation of Indigenous knowledge. Armed with their community motivation, they struggled to participate in and have shaped educational leadership. From their leadership context, they forged and utilized an evolving and evermore-receptive leadership and policy landscape. Ultimately, they were prepared to answer the call that the ethic of consultation implied.

### **Conclusion**

This literature review adhered to its mandate and purpose of not predicting what the research-participants were likely to bring forward but what the researcher needed to consider in preparing to receive the contributions of the research participants. Within the broad themes of origins, suppression, contested spaces and volition, a liberating continuum was prefaced. Sense making of their complex environment emerged a context that reflected back to the participants legitimized and purposeful influence and invited the participants to unfold their narratives within a sovereign space.

### CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The concept of the bricolage (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004) best captures how I relate to knowledge. Bricoleurs occupy a unique research space not bounded by the disciplines (Kincheloe & Berry). That explains my primary allegiance to the bricolage as I resist the imposition of theory and identify with the liberating space between disciplines. Where my view of the limitations of the status quo was a product of my Indigenous experience, the Western concept of the bricolage was a concept that I choose to use as a point of departure. I contend that those who have come to improvisation, *kîkway ka osihtahk*, by necessity then adopted it by design, if at least in a tacit manner. I recognized Indigeneity in that better-than-survival methodology. My methodology, then, is situated at the intersection of tacit knowledge as a way of considering knowledge that has developed in an *unspeakable* place and the inventiveness of the bricoleur as a method of accessing knowledge with *unthinkable* tools. It is at that intersection that I explored the experience of Indigenous educational leadership, the knowledge and strategies that Indigenous educational leaders employed and strategies that made tacit knowledge and skills visible for the development of Indigenous educational leaders. Through introspection, the brilliant defiance of *kîkway ka osihtahk* was brought forward and made tangible for further introspective analysis and application in the ongoing struggle to participate on our own terms and honour our resiliency, adaptability and creativity.

This chapter begins with an analytical framework to help situate me among the research. That is necessary in a study that *writes the researcher in*. I then provide an overview of heuristic research. Heuristic research was, for me, research-proxy for introspection and the most appropriate manner in which to locate the knowledge necessary to elucidate the study. The chapter concludes with a description of the method



including research ethics, participant selection, data collection and analysis, validation and representation.

### **Analytical Framework**

The analytical framework serves to “...reveal privileged epistemologies... when integrating Indigenous and Western methods” as well as recognize nuanced Indigenous methodologies as “...much of Indigenous ways of knowing is internal, personal, and experiential” (Kovach, 2009, p. 43). The evolution of the practice of Western academic research within Indigenous communities challenges Indigenous researchers who attempt to research within their communities with a complex point of departure in both Indigenous and non-Indigenous paradigms. Adding to that complexity is the denial of diversity among and within Indigenous peoples. Henry and Pene (2001) reported, “Some go as far as to assert that the idea of Maori as a collective identity is no longer valid, that only the tribal identity matters” (p. 240). My advantage was that as a person born into ambiguity by virtue of my mixed-blood Indigenous identity, that I made sense of the world through amalgams. The colonized learn to see the world in a unique way. Just as the cradleboard limited physical movement to enhance senses of observation, colonization fosters acuity in resistance, survival and redefinition. This analytical framework is a product of the decolonizing experience, as tacit as it may be.

Colonized experience is constructed of a whole host of events and influences that are rarely witnessed from a vantage point so distant that the parts constitute a whole. Known are the markers of colonization, tacit is how those markers are experienced. Colonization is unknown by the potential of learning from a colonized experience. Tacit knowledge, in an inquiry that aims to mobilize the obscure, considers that

“...alchemically, life’s ordinary ingredients may suddenly add up to a personal and cultural transformation” (Braud & Anderson, 1998, p. xxiii). The lens of this analytical framework honours this complex environment and mobilizes an Indigenous analytical lens born of colonization. Transformation may begin with the individual but “when the inquiry proceeds further than the sketchy maps left by others, following the surprises and ‘chance’ occurrences of the inquiry will guide the way to more gratifying insights and far-reaching conclusions and understanding” (Braud & Anderson, 1998, p. xxvii).

To see with the skill of the bricoleur is a critical yet appreciative gaze that is able to recognize the brilliance and dignity in scrounging for caste-off bits and, ultimately, constructing the theoretical equivalent of an escape hatch, revolutionary weapon or liberated rallying point. The tools of the marginalized have been created through necessity and innovated with that deemed to be benign in their hands. As a dominant colonizer would not be inclined to leave their own weapons behind for the discretionary use of the colonized, Western domains of knowledge production have not advantaged knowledge production from the margins. Still, the marginalized have learned to see tools of knowledge production so that the seemingly void landscape of colonization can be rendered productive by the inventiveness of the colonized.

The bricolage provided a structure from the domain of the unstructured and compelled not allegiance to established protocols but to the spirit of craft and invention (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004). The bricolage offered a critique of the status quo that neither longed to join or dismiss it but to mobilize knowledge from a mixed and churning context. The bricolage reframed power relationships to capitalize on the power inherent in the false void that visible power believed that it created. It blended new insights into

power distribution and knowledge created on the margins to illuminate not Western knowledge or Indigenous knowledge but knowledge incubated in contest. The pragmatic character of the bricoleur that makes things work from that cast off from others had no need to critique the status quo with a longing to be included in it or to dismantle it. Instead, the bricoleur endeavoured to mobilize knowledge from amidst transformation so that knowledge stood alongside recognized sources as a peer. Kincheloe and Berry (2004) claimed that "...bricoleurs enter into the research act as methodological negotiators" (p. 3) and that:

Bricoleurs take seriously ...[the]... creative responsibility to break the lenses of present ways of viewing the world...because such frames have caused such heartbreak and suffering on the part of those who fall outside the favoured race, class, gender, sexual, religious, and ability-related demographic. (p. 19)

It is not, then, a monopoly on the truth that bricoleurs claim, but they "... seek multiple perspectives ...to avoid the monological knowledge that emerges from unquestioned frames of reference and the dismissal of the numerous relationships and connections that link various forms of knowledge together" (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004, p. 24). By recognizing validity and potential from the margins, bricoleurs "...actively construct ... research methods from the tools at hand rather than passively receiving the 'correct,' universally applicable methodologies" (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004, p. 2). Those methods had their genesis in an awakening to "...the social construction of knowledge, understanding, and human subjectivity [through which] they gained a consciousness of their own and others' historicity" (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004, p. 10).

The gaze of the colonized was, though, not simply a redirection based on limitations. Every new path created as a result of a path curtailed must be seen as an act of resistance and a challenge to dominant power structures. The redistribution of power

resided in redistributed participation. Participation was not deemed by the bricoleur to be a passive but a transformative act. Bricoleurs recognized that "...power works best when it is not recognized as power. Power creeps in on little cats' feet to accomplish its regulation and discipline of various individuals and groups" (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004, p. 7). In response, "...bricoleurs seek to better understand both the forces of domination that affect the lives of individuals from race, class, gender, sexual, ethnic, and religious backgrounds outside dominant culture(s) and the worldviews of such diverse peoples" (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004, p. 15). Those alliances answered back to power as "in this ...context bricoleurs are concerned with the empowerment of the subjects of research and the voice to the subjugated and the marginalized" (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004, p. 84). That redistribution-by-empowerment achieved balance in the raising of the genius inherent in the margins.

Knowledge born of contest relied on the bricoleur's call to "...seek to identify what is absent in particular situations – a task ignored by monological, objectivists modes of research" (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004, p. 20). Bricoleurs achieved "...rigour in ...absence [that] can be expressed in numerous ways, including the bricoleur's ability to imagine things that never were; to see the world as it could be; to develop alternatives to oppressive existing conditions; to discern what is lacking in a way that promotes the will to act [and] to understand that there is far more to the world than what we can see" (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004, p. 20). The contest part of the equation was a result of the recognition that bricoleurs "... make a variety of previously repressed features of the social world visible" (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004, p. 20). The contest was more than contest of power but contest of perspective. Kincheloe and Berry (2004) referenced that

in the bricolage "...the arrogance of the empirical expert is abandoned for the humility of diverse perspectives. The conflicts and differences valued by the bricoleur continuously generate a sense of curious uncertainty" (p. 35). The authenticity of the pursuit of a newly articulated knowledge through the challenge to power was a laudable role shared by the allegiance of legitimized critics that included clowns, tricksters and those that actively pursued alternatives. That mission made the bricoleur kin of those critics in a legitimate and systematic deconstruction of the status quo. Put in that frame, the gaze of the colonized became an influential perspective that interpreted knowledge in a manner consistent with experience and mission. The generation of knowledge became a powerful tool in the advancement of decolonization.

With the amalgamated genius of the bricolage firmly established, I diversify the analytical framework to arrive in an Indigenous consciousness. Consistent with the pathway through raised consciousness via Western theory prying open a suppressed Indigenous interpretive identity, the bricolage led me to confront the musings of the Trickster and the influence on how I viewed knowledge. Anishinaabe author Gerald Vizenor's (1988) character muses:

The trickster is embodied in imagination, we see rainbows at certain angles to the sun and earth, but we are never seen in the places we see, or what we see is never what we choose to see, and the trickster is a lure beyond our gaze. (pp. xvii-xviii)

The Trickster's most significant contribution is the knowledge that there is always more than our conscious selves can ever know but the gift is in seeking. The bricolage showed me that there was a cache. *Wîsahkêcâhk* taught me that each cache was a part our birthright. For me, that knowledge eviscerated colonization as it exposed the feebleness of attempts to render Indigenous consciousness inert. Coming to knowledge through an

analytical framework informed by *wisahkêcâhk* empowers as it defines that an Indigenous acuity is part of one's DNA and that arriving at that realization is to find the opening to enlightenment. As Socrates' role in the Allegory of the Cave, (Plato & Bloom, 1968) *wisahkêcâhk* causes one to confront the gap between what we think we see and what is. *Wisahkêcâhk's* enlightenment, though, is in the transition, learning from shifting realities.

### **Ontology**

As this research purports to study the reality of individuals through a common set of experiences, including my own, I offer my interpretation of ontology, the study of being (Crotty, 1998). My ontological stance understands reality constructed by the interaction of actors within the context of space and time (Crotty, 1998). Indigenous perspectives on the nature of reality recognize common gathering points that emphasize that Indigenous cultures are more similar than dissimilar (Sioui, 1992). A contemporary Indigenous ontology is the search for reality from a stance in otherness. Kincheloe (2006) wrote:

The study of indigeneity and indigenous ways of being highlights tacit Western assumptions about the nature and construction of selfhood. A notion of critical ontology emerges in these conceptual contexts that helps us push the boundaries of Western selfhood in the twenty-first century as we concurrently gain new respect for the genius of indigenous epistemologies and ontologies. (p. 181)

In that sense, reclaiming might as easily refer to the tools to name philosophical constructs from an Indigenous perspective as much as reclaiming elements of traditional Indigenous heritage. Reclaiming includes the right and resources to name one's reality. The frame of nominalism becomes a window to otherness. Kincheloe (2006) said:

A critical ontological vision helps us in the effort to gain new understandings and insights as to who we can become. Such a vision helps us move beyond our present state of being--our ontological selves--as we discern the forces that have made us that way. (p. 182)

It is the future reference that associated Indigenous reality with critical ontology.

Further, that perspective endorses a developmental, iterative definition of reality. It is a necessary, and maybe the only, valid ontological stance for colonized Indigenous people.

A critical ontology requires revisiting the role of the bricoleur. Some of the useful remnants used to construct new tools are familiar. That is not to say that they are old and familiar and are just being picked up again. That is inconsistent with the notion of the bricoleur. Some of the tools are outmoded because of a different context and some are not useful as they are incomplete. That was the reason to emphasize the craft of the bricoleur. Reality hinges between the act of reclaiming and what is reclaimed. There is no right reality to reclaim, as there is no right reality to return to. Once on the reclaiming journey, one is cast in the experience of reclaiming and the reality that it entails.

O'Loughlin (1996) posited, "Perception is ... located in neither mind nor body, spirit nor matter, subject nor object. Rather, it is to be found somewhere between the opposing terms" (p. 141). That references ontology of being in a dynamic state.

O'Loughlin (1996) further stated that "...experience does not belong to some pre-social form, it does not occur outside of the dynamic cultural forces" (p. 141). It is those dynamic cultural forces that, for some, are reality rather than influences on reality. As a product of colonization, reclaiming overcomes the need to legitimize the colonizer but instead legitimizes the subject and the meaning in experience that is lying around in pieces.

Stewart-Harawira (2005) offered that "... rather than being limited to a 'codified canon', traditional or indigenous knowledge is an expression of life itself, of how to live, and of the connection between all living things" (p. 35). Stewart-Harawira (2005) said, "In indigenous ontologies, knowledge is both accumulated and applied in ways that involve the 'inner technologies' of heightened consciousness..." (p. 36). A reclaiming ontology couched in a phenomenology of experience arrives at a meaning of being without the baggage of 400 years of colonization and without the imperative of an unclaimable (in its original form, unscathed by time) tradition of 400 years of loss. Loss is not loss with a claim on the validity of the past 400 years. A way of being, being whole, is a claim worth restoring from the pieces. As Kincheloe (2006) indicates, "Using the indigenous metaphor, knowledge lives in the cultures of indigenous peoples" (p. 188).

Contested spaces arise as an imposed defensive position as a result of Indigenous being. That space results in marginalization of worldview as the marginalization associated with minority status is compounded by an unknown and undervalued Indigenous experience. That is a methodologically important space, as it must act as a filter for methodologies of rescue. A methodology of rescue purports to give voice where voice was absent or marginalized. Indigenous experience goes beyond attempting entry into a centre or re-establishing a new centre. Indigenous methodologies unfold new knowledges in new ways for new purposes. Indigenous methodologies grow up amidst deeply spiritual-cultural roots and purposes. Their transplant to academia has been made possible by researchers who have a foot in both worlds or adopt a research stance commensurate with Indigenous paradigms. Indigenous methodologies do not emerge



more fully as they collapse into academic debate but reside wholly within established Indigenous contexts.

The contest of this space, then, is characteristic not of challenge to the status quo but challenge to exist in an unfettered fashion alongside other realities. This uniquely Indigenous experience becomes a methodology of existence, participation and autonomy. What are contested are rich philosophical discourses that need not have been derived from, nor become a derivative of, the status quo. Participation is contested as an ability and right to interpret the world according to Indigenous paradigms. It is an affront to the Western world that Indigenous knowledge is a complete and independent philosophical context. Autonomy is contested in the challenge to unfold Indigenous paradigms at the pace and direction of Indigenous peoples. These characteristics of contest manifest as an ontological stance of place, purpose and legitimacy.

### **Epistemology**

Where ontology employs the question of reality as a broad frame of being, epistemology focuses on the exchange within and outside the space. All people learn and exchange knowledge according to a set of understandings. Indeed, this study is about knowledge, exchange and the roles associated with the transaction. At the broadest level, it is important to depart from positivistic quantification and allegiance to the Western scientific method. More importantly, dismissing positivism dismisses the fallacy of objectivity. This inquiry exists at the pleasure of a challenge to one great truth. The route to new knowledge is affirmation that knowledge radiates from various centres according to those who imagine it.

Where anti-positivist knowledge is a point of departure, constructionism is the path toward an epistemology of presence in reclaiming. Standing amidst the continuum of Indigenous knowledge from pre-contact to the present, there are points defined by ancient heritages, loss and reclaiming. There is no need to cleave off eras of Indigenous being to delimit an epistemology of re-birth, but it is crucial to identify the relative era as it pertains to the research experience.

I staked a claim in the reclaiming era and as a practitioner of reclaiming. I recognized the differences in a knowledge enterprise forged from privilege and that forged in marginalization. I make sense of my experience and learn to access knowledge from what makes sense within a marginalized context rather than concentrate on finding knowledge through what I have yielded. As experience grounded me in contested contexts and a reclaiming experience, my theory of accessing knowledge is similarly grounded in contested space rather than in a cultural milieu not my own.

The task associated with defining epistemology in this manner builds meaning from the context of the exchange and experience of people. In this task I employ another point of departure, which is social constructionism (Crotty, 1998). This paradigm adds the social aspect to the reclaiming endeavour. Social constructionism respects the experiences of both the researcher and co-researchers. I am referring to social constructionism in the sense that Crotty (1998) uses constructionism for epistemological considerations of individual meaning making. Constructionism is a useful conceptualization of the acts of many in similar contexts, making meaning and establishing knowledge paradigms, seemingly independently but inextricably linked through common experience.

Constructionism rejects an objective truth waiting to be discovered in favour of truth or meaning emerging from engagement with the realities of the world so that meaning is not discovered but constructed (Crotty, 1998). Where meaning emerges from a construct of subject and object, there is recognition that different people in different places, times and experiences, will construct meaning differently. My interest was in how constructionism provided a framework to bring an audience to the threshold of a meaning-making experience yet with opportunity to forge meaning on their own terms as "constructionists focus on how knowledge emerges from and gain significance for society [and] interaction among individuals is the primary mechanism..." (Walker, 2015, p. 37). Constructionism, in the sense of deriving meaning from participation in a community, makes room for Indigenous methodologies to emerge (Crotty, 1998). The malleability of constructionism serves as an entry point to craft a vessel in which to gather experiences from in between and make meaning useful for the context of inquiry.

Crotty (1998) said, "If we seek to be consistently constructionist, we will put all understandings, scientific and non-scientific alike, on the very same footing. They are all constructions. None is objective or absolute or truly generalisable" (p. 16). The social construction of knowledge challenges the Western stranglehold on the generation of diverse knowledges by choosing to consider minorities and, ultimately, recognize minority views. Put another way, when social science research allowed in the light of realities grounded in other cultures, it allowed for the diverse thinking of those from other cultures to flourish within broadened social diversity and to ultimately foster diverse thought. Deliberations of those that bridge realities actualize diversity of source and

meaning of knowledge that illustrates my understanding of socially constructionist epistemology.

To drill down further:

...meaning is not discovered but constructed. Meaning does not inhere in the object, merely waiting for someone to come upon it. ...the world and objects in the world are indeterminate. They may be pregnant with potential meaning, but actual meaning emerges only when consciousness engages with them. (Crotty, 1998, pp. 42-43)

It is crucial, then, for this study to consider the colonized-Indigenous experience and its influence on the production of knowledge. Being colonized and decolonizing are typically seen as states of being that can be described. It is less likely, except from an Indigenous perspective, to be seen as a cultural context. We move, then, away from the objects of colonization and decolonization to the experiences of the same. As Crotty recognized, we have objects in the world to construct meaning. The Indigenous experience of research must consider what a colonized experience has done to Indigenous meaning-making experiences and what it has brought to those experiences. Pre-contact Indigenous peoples had common sets of experiences from which to draw common protocols of locating knowledge, mostly from spiritual contexts. Efforts at reclaiming Indigenous ways of knowing often go to those roots but some also consider the Indigenous experience shaped by hundreds of years of marginalization. What, in the spirit of the bricoleur, has been created that is a valid, Indigenous way of knowing? Social construction of knowledge identifies and validates those objects or tools. Resistance, then, is an Indigenous epistemology that can be recognized through a social constructionist lens.

Pushing the limits of a subject-object interaction, Crotty (1998) said that constructionism brings together objectivity and subjectivity. It is intentionality that Crotty said rejects objectivism and subjectivism for the interaction between the subject and object. Crotty (1998) believed that our intentional interaction with the world is the genesis of meaning (p. 45). This is crucial in the context of this study as it is the tacitly intentional experience of being colonized and decolonizing where my interest lies. Intentionality is anti-pacifist, meaning that actors enter and actors exit, always with purpose and intent. Like a wave enveloping a person, there is little control of the wave but control over what one does as a result of the wave, as limited as that control is. Furthering the metaphor, the body acts in ways of survival or even enjoyment as a result of encountering a wave, although that is mostly an involuntary response. I am inspired by Crotty's (1998) notion that:

What constructionism drives home unambiguously is that there is no true or valid interpretation. There are useful interpretations, to be sure, and these stand over against interpretations that appear to serve no useful purpose. There are liberating forms of interpretation too; they contrast sharply with interpretations that prove oppressive. There are even interpretations that may be judged fulfilling and rewarding -- in contradistinction to interpretations that impoverish human existence and stunt human growth. 'Useful', 'liberating', 'fulfilling', 'rewarding' interpretations, yes. 'True' or 'valid' interpretations, no. (p. 47-48)

Those are the interpretations that I seek and an epistemological stance that provides pathways to those interpretations is both grounded in my being and useful for the context of the study.

Intentionality evokes images of choice in terms of how individuals interact with objects rather than how objects are placed in the path of individuals. Launching from a constructionist platform sets the stage for inquiry based on the meeting of subject and object and the nature of the meaning imbued within the context. The nature of the

meaning of the interaction between an individual and an object is contextually bound as is evident in the example of the interaction of a person and a chain. The historical time frame and the colour of one's skin vastly change the nature of the experience within a North American context. How does one interact with chains as slave or master? This is reinforced in Crotty's (1998) perspective that:

...while humans may be described, in constructionist spirit, as engaging with their world and making sense of it, such a description is misleading if it is not set in a genuinely historical and social perspective. It is clearly not the case that individuals encounter phenomena in the world and make sense of them one by one. Instead, we are all born into a world of meaning. We enter a social milieu in which a 'system of intelligibility' prevails. We inherit a 'system of significant symbols'. For each of us, when we first see the world in meaningful fashion, we are inevitably viewing it through lenses bestowed upon us by our culture. Our culture brings things into view for us and endows them with meaning and, by the same token, leads us to ignore other things. (p. 54)

Crotty (1998) continued, "The meanings are thus at once objective and subjective, their objectivity and subjectivity being indissolubly bound up with each other [and that] constructionism teaches us that meaning is always that" (p. 48). Constructionism framed my pursuit of a situated knowledge and ensured that the knowledge production inherent in the concern of the study capitalized on the permission to exist and claimed its own epistemological context without the need for a supportive scaffold of another knowledge paradigm.

Crotty (1998) related, "Constructionism and phenomenology are so intertwined that one could hardly be phenomenological while espousing either an objectivist or subjectivist epistemology" (p. 12). Phenomenology, for me, acted as a point of departure to the theoretical and methodological underpinnings of this study. As it related to epistemology, though, phenomenology provided an epistemological position consistent with my belief in the consciousness of actions and experiences that stem from an

understanding of each individual's autonomous journey through life and the need to be reflective and introspective to both understand the meaning of one's own life experiences and how those meanings can contribute to an understanding of people and society.

Crotty (1998) said, "Thoroughly imbued with -- indeed, predicated upon -- the spirit of social constructionism, the phenomenological movement declared itself from the start a philosophy of radical criticism ... Phenomenology became existentialist in purpose and orientation..." (p. 61). Social constructionism is relativist, and *the way things are* is really just the sense we make of them (Crotty). The ordering of being and knowing is confused and subordinate to being and knowing. This enterprise is central to phenomenology that is predicated on reflection upon interaction of the subject and object. Phenomenological underpinnings are constructionist mainstays. The linking and bridging of these elements at this stage provides clarity of intent and alignment of theory of knowledge production with the enterprise of knowledge production. Crotty (1998) provided an excellent summary with his statement that "a certain relativism is in order, therefore. We need to recognize that different people may well inhabit quite different worlds. Their different worlds constitute for them diverse ways of knowing, distinguishable sets of meanings, separate realities" (p. 64).

It is far too simple, though, to rest on the laurels of an interpretivist approach and expect that I can fit my research interests nicely under a generic epistemological banner. The very reason for adopting an interpretivist stance is that an approach that is "...constructivist or interpretivist better captures epistemological concerns (Miller, Nelson & Moore, 1998, p. 378). Epistemological concerns drove my research interests. Further, I wanted to avoid a situation such that "...when conflicting research contexts are

not examined consciously, researchers internalize conflicting epistemologies which in turn produce conflicted research voices (Miller, Nelson & Moore, p. 399). At the level of an interpretivist epistemology, I am not conflicted. When considering my epistemological influences grounded either in phenomenology or Indigenous knowledge, I enter a contested space where I need to explore, if not rationalize, my epistemological stance both for confidence in this study as well as to ensure that the voice of this research is not conflicted. My research voice is from a contested space and I need to ensure that voice is authenticated rather than viewed as a deficit for lack of resolved conflict by recognizing, affirming and subsuming contest into the inquiry.

Narrowing to a coherent and grounded epistemological position is less of a funnel than a converging of intersecting paths. I do not believe, as Walker and Evers (1999) query, that "...research traditions are incommensurable" (p. 40). Their discussion of the epistemological association with education, based on the context of its purpose, explained that some believe in a gathering of educators at an epistemological rendezvous point. That "...epistemological unity... (Walker & Evers, 1999, p. 41) is also often implied in Indigenous research. I do not intend to gloss over any potential *epistemological divide* (Walker & Evers) between interpretivism and Indigenous knowledge, nor do I intend to fabricate unity, but to situate my research interests within a broad interpretivist framework, where I move from a constructionist perspective to a phenomenological influence to an Indigenous epistemological expression with the skill of the bricoleur. Each stop along the way offers a refuge for the bricoleur who, in turn, places currency on the balance in favour of a reclaiming knowledge paradigm. What was borrowed from



those quite distinct paradigms converged into something useful and indicative of the complex Indigenous journey from wholeness to fracture and back again.

### **Theoretical Perspective**

The concept of the bricolage is best represented in the theoretical perspective. It describes a pragmatic space where potential resides. The genius of that space is that it spawns inventiveness and thriving while it is a relegated space. From the margins, great things happen. My use of theoretical perspective is the action to the statements of being (ontology) and knowing (epistemology). Where ontology and epistemology were situated in my experience of conditions out of my control, theoretical perspective is what I elect to do with being and knowledge vis-à-vis this research. Where loss and re-claiming are attributed to the context surrounding me as an Indigenous person, my theoretical perspective is how I act as an Indigenous person with a theoretical stance. The role of the bricoleur genuinely comes to fruition through theoretical perspective as journeying through an Indigenous experience picking up remnants then allows me to fashion a useful paradigm in the pursuit of reclaiming. According to Crotty (1998), theoretical perspective includes the definition and value of human knowledge and, through these considerations, outlines the prediction for the knowledge the research will uncover and to what end. Theoretical perspective is the philosophical stance that underpins the methodology and provides a foundation for the argument.

Theoretical perspective warrants a discussion of the bridge from my ontological and epistemological descriptions to methodology. I stake a claim in interpretivism. Crotty (1998) wrote, “The interpretivist approach ... looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world” (p. 67). This is where my

reliance on the historical and contemporary colonizing experiences to interpret being and coming to knowledge positions me to interpret the social world. Garman (2006) added, “A basic tenet of interpretivism suggests that as reflective human beings, we construct our realities, for the most part, in discourse communities” and that “interpretivists are concerned with symbolic meaning and various forms of representation that help the reader better understand the phenomenon under study” (p. 2). It is that tipping point that moves me from experiencing to acting. I can say I am an interpretivist but that is just a statement. It is in my actions that validate my positionality. As an interpretivist, I enter a world of symbols and representation that I employ to represent knowledge origin and exchange with the use of loss in colonization, reclaiming in Indigenous methodologies and meaning making in the tradition of the bricoleur.

Another point of departure that requires careful consideration in setting up the argument prior to embarking on a new path is the complex overlay of phenomenology and Indigenous paradigms. It is a tenuous pathway as using a body of knowledge from a Western philosophical tradition is risky for most as it requires careful attention to understanding the tradition to ensure that the use of the philosophy is genuine. With phenomenology, for example, there are many researchers who adopt phenomenology as a methodological stance and avoid immersion into the philosophical tradition. Some may describe this as a safe zone because there may not be the same scrutiny on the researcher’s command of the philosophy as the stated intent is to use phenomenology as a set of processes for social research and rely on the work of others who have crafted the methodology. The other option is to adopt phenomenology with its full philosophical potential. That approach requires careful and laborious study because to use a philosophy

as a bridge to new knowledge or to critique or extend the body of knowledge requires a thorough command of the tradition. I employ a third approach; that of using phenomenology as a point of departure to a methodology grounded in experience.

My theoretical perspective is encapsulated in a simple enough equation. Phenomenology provided me a link from my rootedness in a colonized experience to the role of philosophy in elucidating meaning to an Indigenized methodology that makes sense for the explication of my meaning-making experiences. Put another way, a jaded experience caused by being a product of colonization shut me out of the philosophical debate that helped to figure out ways through the quagmire of colonization. Phenomenology inspired in me a passion for the role of social research and higher order analysis that I employed in understanding the value of experience in both understanding context and mapping a way forward. I then transferred my philosophical inspiration to Indigenous traditions of the meaning of being and knowing. Most importantly, though, is that the process presented as a coherent cycle. Given my theoretical perspective as bricoleur, I see phenomenology as lying on the side of my path in the form that I found it. Indigenous methodologies were also lying in my path in the form that I found them. What I choose to craft will have representations of both. The tool, however, will likely look more like an Indigenous tool than a European tool; more like an arrowhead than a ploughshare. Still, it is all grounded in my experience and all a product of interpretation.

Using phenomenology as a point of departure toward Indigenous methodologies has the potential to be interpreted as dismissal of the completeness of Indigenous philosophy, ontology and epistemology. I believe that all of these considerations exist, whole and intact, in Indigenous communities, including my own. In my cautious

approach, though, I am compelled to describe the entire journey from inspiration to completion of the research. It would be, for me, disingenuous to diminish that influence. Further, my theoretical perspective is that of the transformation, the journey and the use of all useful parts in designing new approaches to research. The inspiration for my adoption and use of phenomenology is in its treatment of:

Culture with a good measure of caution and suspicion ... [as] cultures may be enabling but, paradoxically, ... also crippling. While it offers us entry to a comprehensive set of meanings, it shuts us off from an abundant font of untapped significance. (Crotty, 1998, p. 71)

It is that stated purpose that positions phenomenology to be a catalyst to cast off descriptors such as colonized, liberating or Indigenized. The through-line to all of those potential categorizations is the verb – reclaiming. Reclaiming is an authentic stance and positionality. Phenomenology, though, is inextricably linked to my discovery and reclaiming exercise. It becomes, then, a part of the experience of reclaiming. Reclaiming, as a theoretical perspective, is both the focus of concern for this study and the methodology. There is an immediate need in this mobilizing type of research to:

Lay aside, as best we can, the prevailing understandings of ... phenomena and revisit our immediate experience of them [to allow] possibilities for new meaning [to] emerge for us or ... at least an authentication and enhancement of former meaning. (Crotty, 1998)

That is the currency of phenomenology for this research. The essential elements of bracketing and discovery of meaning in the essence of experience are necessary. There are Indigenous ways of locating knowledge and motivating but I am interested in those exact functions rather than locating practices that approximate those experiences. I am also interested, in a staking-a-claim kind of way, in Indigenizing phenomenology through

backflow inherent in using a theoretical perspective from another camp. Aligned with this orientation is the perspective that:

Our cultural heritage can ... be seen as preempting the task of meaning making so that, for the most part, we simply do not do what constructionism describes us as doing. Phenomenology, however, invites us to do it. It requires us to engage with phenomena in our world and make sense of them directly and immediately.  
(Crotty, p. 79)

That single statement encapsulates what a mobilizing study is for me. Casting off the potentially limiting influences that characterize our experience, we begin to see our experience proper. My stated purpose is that my peers and contemporaries transition from thinking about what an experience of colonization and decolonization means and starts to see what it is doing and recognize its potential. I do mean its potential rather than their potential: the potential of the experience. The bricoleur again appears as a Trickster with an emphasis on using the pieces to make useful tools. This is the use of phenomenology with adaptive purpose.

A theoretical perspective that carves out a niche in reclaiming needs to achieve access to new knowledge without dismissing the unique characteristics that underpins the need and desire to reclaim. Those motivators are not peripheral but are essential characteristics. Crotty (1998) identified that:

The phenomenological method ... is geared towards collecting and analyzing data in ways that do not prejudice their subjective character. It puts in place a number of procedures to prevent, or at least minimise, the imposition of the researcher's presuppositions and constructions on the data. (p. 83)

That must not be confused with a pursuit of objectivity. Where objectivity claims a truth uninhibited by forces that might apply influence and risk of distorting the truth, phenomenology creates an experiential sidebar that uniquely focuses on meaning resulting from experience but doesn't dismiss the experience. Phenomenology offers

clarity of purpose that emphasizes experience. Crotty (1998) endorses the ability of phenomenology to both launch from and mind the integrity of experience with his statement, "What phenomenology offers social inquiry is not only a beginning rooted in immediate social experience but also methodology that requires a return to that experience at many points along the way. It is both starting point and touchstone" (p. 85). Further, he provides the motivation for the role of the bricoleur in his statement:

Phenomenologists chafe under what they see to be a tyrannous culture. They long to smash the fetters and engage with the world in new ways to construct new understandings. Research, for phenomenologists, is this very attempt to break free and see the world afresh. (Crotty, 1998, p. 86)

There are no more concise words to say what this motivating, reclaiming study set out to do.

My theoretical perspective was made whole through deference to Indigenous methodologies. I am, after all, stating that reclaiming is an inherent part of Indigenous culture and being. That is essential in considering a theoretical perspective as Indigenous people make meaning of the world from Indigenous perspectives. This is true for any people of any culture but that is also predicated upon the fact that cultures are dynamic. In a mobilizing study, the need, in turn, is to explore contemporary, multi-influenced experiences as Indigenous experiences to honour and validate adaptability, the transition of Indigenous elements into contemporary cultures and the recognition of resistance and reclaiming as Indigenous experiences. That approach fails to be satisfied with Indigenous symbols but goes to the core of the symbols. For example, the circle is often used as a symbol to illustrate holism in Indigenous cultures. The circle is simple but holism is complex. Where reclaiming, which is not typically viewed as an Indigenous

symbol, is extrapolated, it becomes a very powerful and enduring symbol of Indigenous experience.

This research is couched in a continuum from experience to research interest and ultimately manifest in methodology. As in transpersonal research, where a history, realization, motivation and arrival at a new state or plain are integral to the research endeavour, (Braud & Anderson, 1998) the exploration of Indigenous experiences benefit from that same inquiry-process-methodology coherence. To close the loop, “...interpretivist portrayals strive for coherence, which provide the reader with a vivid picture and the meanings about the experience under study” (Garman, 2006, p. 2). This is essential in the domain of making-sense research where clarity of purpose and process are as essential for the researcher, research participants and the reader alike.

More so than a qualitative-quantitative debate, Indigenous peoples have no *non-contested* space to retreat to. Non-contested space is only pre-contact Indigenous experience. From contact, forward, a contested reality results from living a defensive experience where issues of Indigenous rights, worldview or future aspirations emerge from a defensive position that defends existence, value and authenticity. Minority Indigenous experience pushes back against a majority view that has been advanced to represent the norm. Challenges to the norm suffer the double disadvantage of a lack of recognition of authenticity as well as the perennial need to always be the challenger. Where new ideas emerge as a branch of the Western knowledge tree, Indigenous paradigms are a runner from a taproot fighting for a glimpse of sunlight.

Using epistemology as a generic term for the meaning of knowledge and then setting off to look for the meaning of knowledge in Indigenous circles is problematic.

Meyer (2001) reflected that she may be “trying to strengthen... [her] ...Hawaiian self by discussing [epistemology] in Western philosophical terms” (p. 188). I recognize her desire to cast off the need for Western philosophical tradition and I, too, use Western philosophical terms, to a differing degree, as a point of departure. I also have no intent of achieving complete departure. I revel in the space in between. The question is whether this can be done both with integrity and with the endorsement of those that might prefer me to choose? Like Meyer, I do not want to write to be antagonistic; it is what I believe. Where do I find an epistemology of the in-between? It is a fair criticism to say that if I avoid adopting another tribal epistemology or even my own tribe’s epistemology that might be understood by someone more steeped in the culture, that I give phenomenology exposure just because it is accessible. I am maintaining a constructionist approach by constructing my understanding of knowledge through my various influences and anchoring interpretation in an amalgam that is as diverse as I am. Like Meyer’s (2001) reflection, “Epistemology is not separate from a culture’s essence, from our ontology” (p. 197) I, too, aim to contextualize epistemology. I am as inspired by sacred teachings within the context of Indigenous ceremonial practices as I am by Merleau-Ponty’s (1968) *The Visible and the Invisible*. They are equally poetry, prayer and song.

### **Heuristic Research**

I am not going to say Western theory is useless, that it’s white man’s knowledge and we shouldn’t use it and all that stuff. That’s a load of bull – we need to use all the very best available theoretical and methodological tools, and, where necessary develop new approaches when these tools are inadequate. (Graham Smith in Kovach, 2009, p. 91)

That heuristic research maintains the researcher’s personal motivation throughout an inquiry (Moustakas, 1990) is revolutionary for researchers inquiring from the margins.



It is revolutionary because its phenomenological roots clear through methodological and theoretical clutter by prompting reflection on *what is*, which is crucial for a colonized population that struggles to escape interpretive paradigms of the majority. Heuristic research is motivated by the interpretive wrestling's of the researcher where the pursuit of objectivity risks neutralizing personal motivation (Moustakas, 1990). As hooks (2006) imparted, "For us, true speaking is not solely an expression of creative power; it is an act of resistance, a political gesture that challenges the politics of domination that would render us nameless and voiceless" (p. 510). Despite prolific qualitative research paradigms ever more tailored to bringing forth marginalized voice, the act of liberating voice is still an act of revolution for the proliferation of voice of the marginalized where that voice implicates the status quo. Indeed, hooks said that:

Moving from silence into speech is for the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited, and those who stand and struggle side by side a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life and new growth possible. It is that act of speech, of "talking back," that is no mere gesture of empty words, that is the expression of moving from object to subject -- the liberated voice. (p. 510)

Methodology that promotes researcher participation authenticates the researcher's interest and experience so that the motivation is not lost by dilution into a research motivation concerned more with fidelity to methodology than with fidelity to experience. The revolutionary nature of heuristic research is achieved through association with Indigenous inquiry where it becomes a tool useful in the act of liberation. I turn to heuristic inquiry as a tool useful in maintaining my research intent throughout the research process so that heuristic inquiry is a useful proxy for Indigenous inquiry as it represents my interests and intent.

Bach (2002) identified that “heuristic scholars are self-directed. They follow a personal and solitary path of discovery” (p. 99). That statement captures the unshakeable overlay that accompanies all of my research explorations. I came to heuristic research by necessity and structured its use in such a way that its characteristics and benefits both helped to answer my research question as well as contribute to my personal growth and that of the research participants. Bach stated:

Heuristic scholars are individuals attuned to self. They have a high degree of self-awareness and tacit knowledge. They are intuitive and respectful of their own processing styles. Heuristically oriented individuals use personal experience as a point of origin for exploration of interests, questions, and research topics. For heuristic scholars, self-knowledge is a primary tool. (p. 98-9)

My commitment was to structure an inquiry that mobilizes tacit knowledge associated with decolonizing acts as a heuristic so that opportunity to learn and grow could be afforded to others as growth opportunities were afforded to me as researcher and to the research participants as co-researchers. All have the potential to reflect and grow but there is a need to promote that reflection and growth where the engine of colonization has curtailed sustaining self-dialogue.

Heuristic inquiry needs to be seen as more than useful because I am a solitary problem solver with a particular motivation. Deference to indwelling knowledge and ways of coming to knowledge that are inherent in Indigenous cultures creates an association with Indigenous paradigms and validates this inquiry as useful in Indigenous inquiry. Heuristic research is validated, then, within both the researcher’s motivation and the research context. As “...a person can only know something through his or her internal vantage point,” (Bach, 2002, p. 97) heuristic research has the simple but

powerful goal of mediating vantage point and research context so that the researcher is a signpost to truth rather than a distraction. Heuristic research is:

... a process of internal search through which one discovers the nature and meaning of experience and develops methods and procedures for further investigation and analysis. The self of the researcher is present throughout the process and, while understanding the phenomenon with increasing depth, the researcher also experiences growing self-awareness and self-knowledge. (Moustakas, 1990, p. 9)

The problem and solution adhere to the person within a heuristic research study, as they become the vehicle for learning and growth by constructing their way forward.

It was the priority for growing self-awareness and self-knowledge that this research sought to exploit. The blazing of new trails with new devices is a characteristic of Indigenous communities. This reality requires the kind of discovery that heuristic research can accomplish. Heuristic research was essential to this study for its ability to generate new meaning from the researcher-research participant collaborative relationship. Moustakas (1990) said, “The process of discovery leads investigators to new images and meanings regarding human phenomena” (p. 9). It was essential that this study’s methodology accounted for both bringing forth new knowledge on a familiar trajectory and bringing forth new knowledge despite what that familiar trajectory had suppressed.

Heuristic research is anchored in phenomenology (Moustakas, 1990).

Phenomenology promotes a pre-reflective mode of inquiry essential in drawing knowledge from the quagmire of colonized experience. Heuristic research allows for:

Whatever presents itself in the consciousness of the investigator as perception, sense, intuition or knowledge [to] represent... an invitation for further elucidation [so that what] ...appears, what shows itself as itself, casts a light that enables one to come to know more fully what something is and means. (Moustakas, 1990, p. 10-11)

That un-cluttering effect ensures that "...the research question and methodology flow out of inner awareness, meaning and inspiration" (Moustakas, 1990, p, 11). Moustakas (1990) reflected that the researcher's "...primary task is to recognize whatever exists in ...consciousness as a fundamental awareness, to receive and accept it, and then to dwell on its nature and possible meanings" (p. 11). A methodology useful for the purpose of this study had to avoid the pitfalls of a less-than-convincing research motivation and always return to a purposeful and commonly shared motivation among a definable population for a definite purpose. The phenomenological underpinnings of heuristic research created the conditions to uncouple experience from the limiting pre-interpretations that accompany a colonized experience and instead be attuned to unfettered experience that was fresh and ripe for interpretation without artificially and externally induced interpretations.

The unit of inquiry in heuristic research is the self but not necessarily the individual. The individual implies a solitary pursuit. A focus on the self raises consideration for the role of the person within a particular context. Exemplary of this self-but-not-selfish focus is evident in Moustakas' (1990) statement, "I begin the heuristic investigation with reference to a question or problem until an essential insight is achieved, one that will throw a beginning light onto a critical human experience" (p. 11). Where the motivation emerged from personal reflection, the objective was to illuminate a common human experience. Heuristic inquiry exploits the "...unshakeable connection [that] exists between what is out there, in its appearance and reality, and what is within ...[the individual]... in reflective thought, feeling and awareness" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 12). Specific to colonized experience, exposing the relationship between individual and

communal experiences contributes to dismantling the myth of individual failure in place of exposing the story of collective marginalization. More importantly, it has the potential to take individual heroic acts and recognize in them patterns of strength and inventiveness that are commonly held if not sometimes suppressed. The unit of discovery, though, is the self and uncovering the capacity inherent in the human being and its potential contribution to the community is "...a return to the self, a recognition of self-awareness, and a valuing of one's own experience" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 13).

Writing oneself in to heuristic research is a complex process that is more than a resistance to objectivity. Researcher participation in a heuristic study is twofold. It both promotes the potential within the individual and it validates the research through personal experience. Moustakas (1990) says that heuristic research:

...challenges me to rely on my own resources, and to gather within myself the full scope of my observations, thought, feelings, senses, and intuitions; to accept as authentic and valid whatever will open new channels for clarifying a topic, question, problem, or puzzlement. (p. 13)

That validation of the contribution to new knowledge through gifts that lie within was the primary reason to choose to use heuristic research. The essential contribution to heuristic research was that "...the investigator must have had a direct, personal encounter with the phenomenon being investigated (Moustakas, 1990, p. 14). That is crucial, given a constructionist methodology because of the belief that "...knowledge grows out of direct human experience and can be discovered and explicated initially through self-inquiry" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 17). Just as personal reflection leverages the tools of experience, so, too, does personal experience leverage knowledge based in a context of familiarity.

Heuristic research fosters the revelation of knowledge deeply rooted in experience, as "...at the base of all heuristic discovery, is the power of revelation in tacit

knowing” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 20). Moustakas (1990) claimed, “Without the intuitive capacity to form patterns, relationships, and inferences, essential material for scientific knowledge is denied or lost” (p. 23). Heuristic research assumes that there is knowledge that resides between and among that which is easily articulated and that it is concealed in human experience. Tacit knowledge is a remnant of easily articulated knowledge. Moustakas promoted heuristic research as a tool useful in enabling “...one to see something as it is and to make whatever shifts are necessary to remove clutter and make contact with necessary awareness and insights into one’s experiences” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 25). Removing clutter and arriving at insight into experience that offers meaning-making opportunity results from the practice of the essential elements of heuristic research.

Heuristic research stems from a personally motivating experience in a homogenous community while holding a mirror up to that community to discover meaning in experience. It provides structure that can help to elucidate meaning without the burden of having to dismiss the contexts familiar to the research participants. My decision to use heuristic research methodology was deliberate and the choice satisfied the caution that “researchers have the task of applying conceptual frameworks that demonstrate the theoretical and practical underpinnings of their research, and, if successful, these frameworks illustrate ‘the thinking’ behind ‘the doing’” (Kovach, 2009, p. 39). While heuristic research provided the methodological considerations and, as will be described later, the method of data collection and interpretation, it also brought forward considerations inherent in the philosophical orientation that provides a bridge to the unique characteristics of this study. It is the connectors between the characteristics of

heuristic research on the one hand and the participants and their context on the other that offer concepts that ground this study in Indigenous experience. The ideal of locating and motivating a liberating knowledge is arrived at through deference to tacit knowledge and the useful application of that knowledge.

Emphasizing tacit knowledge and the inventiveness of the bricoleur is a currency that must be emphasized throughout in preparing to authentically receive the contributions of the research participants. Where this study advanced voices of reclaiming and the authenticity of the experience of Indigenous educational leaders' contributions to policy development, it did so from a position of ownership. Possessed voices countered the image of dispossessed voices. This study represents new knowledge as an insider speaks of the familiar. A possessed voice implies that new knowledge will be generated from the words and experiences of the participants rather than from the disassociation of the words and experiences of the participants in relation to an external other. The participants' voice presented in an autonomous manner authenticates their context and experience, as voice is not evaluated as a voice of departure that requires a voice of the majority to exist. That approach ensured that this research was built on Indigenous paradigms by virtue of endorsing the individual in context. Being Indigenous is not under scrutiny and speaking with a voice other than that of the status quo was accepted and expected.

### **The Principles of Heuristic Research**

The following principles of heuristic research provided considerations that helped to maintain focus on the methodology by serving as guideposts in the collection and interpretation of data:

**Focus of Inquiry.** Moustakas (1990) described that through "... exploratory open-ended inquiry, self-directed search, and immersion in an active experience, one is able to get inside the question, become one with it, and thus achieve an understanding of it" (p. 15). That process established a closeness of the researcher to the inquiry, to the research population and to the experience. Where heuristic research was designed for a researcher motivated by a personally compelling interest, it provided structure for personal attributes to be useful in the research process. Heuristic research is not a cleansed research that removes the voice of the researcher or homogenizes the research participants. The responsibility, when adopting this integrated approach to personal motivation and knowledge generation, is to saturate the inquiry with evidence of personal investment. My query had long been a reckoning of my experiences in representing Indigenous peoples in consultation. The fact that I had an unyielding passion to illuminate this question for years is testament to my focus in this inquiry. I have not wavered from my desire to better understand the phenomenon of serving community through educational leadership. Immersing myself in that question has been a deeply satisfying endeavour that has merged my struggles and enlightenment with those that have shared similar challenges and opportunities.

**Self-dialogue.** Moustakas (1990) claimed that "... knowledge grows out of a direct human experience and can be discovered and explicated initially through self inquiry" (p. 17). That recognition was a statement of the belief in a constructionist perspective and respect for the autonomy of the individual traversing a particular experience. Providing the opportunity to process experience contributes to a deepened understanding of one's participation in a context of interest. Embarking on a heuristic



research journey allowed me an outlet for the persistent concern to illuminate a pivotal aspect of my professional service in hopes of offering guidance and support to others on a similar trajectory.

**Tacit Knowledge.** Deference to tacit knowledge within heuristic research offered consideration for another source of knowledge because, as Bach (2002) stated, "...we often know without understanding how we know. The heuristic process seeks to elucidate what has been known at a tacit level" (p. 94). As will be demonstrated in the presentation of the data, the research participants sometimes acted without deliberate recognition for the scope of their individual acts. My aim was to precipitate deliberate reflection of tacit acts.

**Intuition.** Bach (2002) said, "Through intuition, the researcher uses cues from what is observed to build upon knowledge previously held about the topic under investigation" (p. 94). Moustakas (1990) added, "Without the intuitive capacity to form patterns, relationships, and inferences, essential materials for scientific knowledge is denied or lost" (p. 23). Consideration for intuitive knowledge takes on greater emphasis with a colonized population where colonization, by its very nature, reduces the population's reliance on its own devices. This research endeavour aimed to gather fleeting reflections and demonstrate that those glimpses of purpose and control in a sea of occupation are worth coalescing, analyzing and extrapolating.

**Indwelling.** Bach (2002) described this essential process of heuristic research where "the researcher dwells with the experience of the phenomenon, pursuing thoughts, feelings, and awareness until a substantial insight is achieved" (p. 93). The indwelling process is an elongated process that may begin long before the research process is

undertaken. One of the few benefits of the protracted timeline of this research was that indwelling was assured. The antithesis of indwelling is abandonment, which was never a consideration in this research endeavour.

**Focusing.** Focusing is a critical aspect of heuristic research that must built included but cannot be fabricated. Bach (2002) identified that “the steps in a formal process of focusing include clearing an inner space, giving sustained attention to the question being explored, and being able to listen to what calls from within” (p. 94). Focusing as a commitment of the researcher must be evidenced with both a rich description of the process as well as evidence that the focusing contributed to increasingly rich analysis. The presentation of the data will evidence the role of introspection in arriving at understandings of the phenomenon of interest.

**The Internal Frame of Reference.** Bach (2002) claimed, “The internal frame of reference is a guiding concept in heuristic research and makes possible all other processes in the model. The personal is the basic foundation, the beginning of a knowledge base (p. 94). This study was predicated on a personal motivation and commitment. The research question and motivation were inextricably linked so that the personal motivation could not be sidestepped with fidelity to the research question.

### **The Stages of Heuristic Research**

Heuristic inquiry follows the seven stages of initial engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication, creative synthesis and validation (Moustakas, 1990). Those steps are briefly described below:

**Initial Engagement.** The semi-narrative style of this research accounted for the initial engagement stage. My personal investment in Indigenous participation in education and my determination to enhance participation by mobilizing the potential of Indigenous educational leaders served as testament to my engagement. My engagement, broadly, began with being an Indigenous person. My engagement, more specifically, was with my concern for the participation of Indigenous educational leaders and my desire to make the motivation of that group my singular objective and the objective of this study. That accounts for an “...intense interest [or] a passionate concern that calls out to the researcher, one that holds important social meanings and personal, compelling implications” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 27).

The motivation of this research was a question of recognition of a pause in a pathway. It was an introspective challenge that asked *how we got here, for what purpose, with what intent* and *how do we move forward?* It was a re-visioning what counted as expertise and leadership. The intense curiosity that arose in me associated with the Duty to Consult (Supreme Court of Canada, 2004) enraptured me. It caused a flood of self-challenge, doubt, discernment and repositioning. It also spawned recognition of an inherent strength of being that accompanied recognition of place, position and purpose.

**Immersion.** Immersion is the process by which “...the researcher lives the question in waking, sleeping and even dream states” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 28). That process is difficult to check off as a completed step in heuristic research. One might argue that it is unavoidable as a step in the process of engaging in research for the purpose of a doctoral dissertation. The words of Stalile (2006) resonated with me in her reflection:

Though I did not know it at the time, the unrest generated by my search for a dissertation topic, a research method, and a resolution to the dilemmas of educational inclusion were inextricably intertwined. All converged to become a part of my initial engagement with the dissertation process. (p. 37)

My immersion will be more directly accounted for through my dialogue with the respondents' texts, a process that allowed me to account for my understanding, learning and growth as well as evidence my immersion.

**Incubation.** The incubation stage is where "...the researcher retreats from the intense, concentrated focus on the question" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 28). The incubation process allows the heuristic researcher to "...give... birth to a new understanding or perspective that reveals additional qualities of the phenomenon, or a vision of its unity" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 29). That stage was accomplished serendipitously through the length of time that I have been immersed in this research. The benefits of those retreats appear in the self-dialogue that prefaces each of the products of the heuristic research process.

**Illumination.** Moustakas (1990) described illumination as "...a breakthrough into conscious awareness of qualities and a clustering of qualities into themes inherent in the question" (p. 29). This stage is accounted for in data analysis. What marks data analysis as illumination is the expectation of self-discovery. The clustering exercise needs to account for more than utility in representing the data as provided by the research participants but must account for generating new insights into the phenomenon under study and the deepening self-awareness and growth of the researcher.

**Explication.** Moustakas (1990) described the purpose of the explication stage as being "...to fully examine what has awakened in consciousness, in order to understand its various layers of meaning" (p. 31). That is where the heuristic researcher uses tools such

as "...focusing, indwelling, self-searching, and self-disclosure" (Moustakas, p. 31).

Explication is a conscious stage that warrants depth of analysis into the awakenings of illumination. As illumination, explication produced analysis rooted in the contributions of the research participants and focused on the growth and discovery of the researcher.

**Creative Synthesis.** The creative synthesis is invoked "once the researcher has mastered knowledge of the material that illuminates and explicates the question" (Moustakas, 1990, pp. 31-32). The researcher is challenged to put the components and core themes into a creative synthesis [which]... usually takes the form of a narrative description utilizing verbatim materials and examples..." (Moustakas, 1990, p. 31-32).

**Validation.** Validation asks whether "...the ultimate depiction of the experience derived from one's own rigorous, exhaustive self-searching and from the explications of others present comprehensively, vividly, [and] accurately [represents] the meanings and essences of the experience" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 32). Validation is an integral part of the process rather than a discreet event as it is:

...enhanced by returning to the research participants, sharing with them the meanings and essences of the phenomenon as derived from reflection on and analysis of the verbatim transcribed interviews and other material, and seeking their assessment for comprehensiveness and accuracy. (Moustakas, 1990, p. 34)

Validation in heuristic research traces a line back to the researcher, who has been an instrument of reflection and meaning making throughout the study. Unlike a common conceptualization of validation in qualitative research that defaults always to the study participants and is judged successful based on objectivity, validation in heuristic research reflects back on the researcher as the primary vehicle for learning (Moustakas, 1990). Further, Moustakas described that "the heuristic researcher's 'constant appraisal of

significance' and 'checking and judging' facilitate the process of achieving a valid depiction of the experience being investigated" (p. 33). The cycle of evidence and validation results in illumination of the phenomenon evidenced by "...first-person accounts of individuals who have directly encountered the phenomenon in experience" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 38).

Heuristic inquiry was uniquely appropriate for this research as it "...contains a promise of growth for the researcher; it does not permit the knowledge seeker to remain untouched. Additionally, through rigorous self-analysis and self-reflection the researcher discovers unknown treasures within (Bach, 2002, p. 100). It was that "...return to the self, a recognition of self-awareness, and of valuing one's own experience..." that makes heuristic research so compelling for this study (Bach, 2002, p. 13). Launching this inquiry from a platform of heuristic research provided the through-line, which ensured that my motivation to promote authentication of the experience and tools of advocating from marginalization remained paramount.

## **Method**

### **Research Participants**

The primary consideration in selecting research participants was that we shared experience. At a cursory level, the shared experience was that of being an Indigenous educational leader. Specifically, I sought out participants who identified as an Indigenous person and who were currently, or had been in the previous five years, an educational leader. I identified educational leadership as a director of education or superintendent of education in a Saskatchewan provincial school division or a band controlled education tribal authority. That characteristic was discernable by position.

The accompanying characteristic was that the research participant had engaged in consultation for the purposes of policy development related to improved outcomes of Indigenous students was partly assumed through position and explored further through an introductory interview. As will be addressed in chapter four, the imperative of consultation was refined and reframed throughout the study. Although I had experienced my greatest dissonance around consultative experiences, the participants identified with similar struggles in many more diverse experiences.

The second consideration in selecting research-participants was the heuristic research imperative of concern for the phenomena. Indeed, some may share experiences without sharing the need to make meaning of those experiences. I planned to assess the depth of reflection through an initial interview (Appendix 3).

Purposive sampling was employed to access potential research participants from a recognizably small population. As there was no centralized body to provide access to all Indigenous superintendents or directors in provincial school divisions or First Nations tribal councils, I employed purposive sampling to approach who I was aware of and use the process to connect with others as I proceeded. As it turned out, I could easily identify all of those who I believed fit the criteria in provincial school divisions and was 90% certain that I was also able to do so in the tribal council educational authorities throughout the province. I sent a personal letter of invitation to participate (Appendix 4) to all of the sixteen potential participants that I was able to identify. Of the sixteen that I invited to participate, I received a positive response to meet for a visit from fourteen. I then made personal contact with each of those who expressed interest, either in a face-to-face visit or in a telephone conversation. Of the fourteen that I personally visited or had

telephone conversations with, eleven agreed to continue with their interest. Two of the eleven determined that they were too busy to continue. One decided that her experience was not relevant to the selection criteria so that person withdrew.

I had originally intended to select participants one by one as they met the criteria and affirmed their interest but the overwhelming response meant that I had well beyond the four that I had intended to work with before even contemplating selection. The decision to select four participants caused me great consternation because I felt I should select randomly but I knew through the initial visits that some had great depth of experience and the willingness to discuss and reflect on those experiences while others related little to me or discussed very little about their experiences during those visits. I was also concerned that I would not realize a balance of gender, cultural affiliation and geographic representation, although those were not specified criteria.

Not surprisingly, those with the greatest depth of experience and the willingness to discuss those experiences most readily also had the most experience in educational leadership. In the end, I selected four study participants based on their long association with the selection criteria compared to others who had expressed an interest in participating. I selected four individuals all with over thirty years in Indigenous education and educational leadership.

The number of participants was reduced to three as one participant set up meetings, yet when I arrived in that individual's community, that person was not home. After the second failed attempt, I decided that the individual may have felt an obligation to participate in the study but may have been reluctant to do so. I chose not to draw attention to the missed meetings and ceased contact with that individual for the purposes



of this study. I have spoken to that individual on a few occasions since and we continue to have a good relationship although we do not speak of that experience.

The heuristic research process contributed to rich descriptions of the experiences of the research participants. Through that process, one comes to intimately know the participants. These introductions are cursory and characterized by what I knew of the participants at initial contact and meeting. These introductions are more demographic than will be revealed through the presentation of the data. Note that each of the participants either provided a pseudonym or were assigned a pseudonym if they had no preference.

### **Meet the Participants**

Anna is a First Nations woman from a Cree community in central Saskatchewan, Canada. She grew up with parents and relatives who instilled in her a strong sense of Cree identity that she expresses in the Cree language. She has a high profile in the community as a result of her politically active family and her own presence in the First Nations community. Anna was a young mom when she returned to school to acquire a degree in education. She has a variety of teaching experience in the kindergarten to grade-twelve education system and in adult education. She returned to school and acquired a master's degree in education. Anna served as a director of education for individual band controlled schools as well as for a tribal education authority. Anna also has many years of experience in First Nations education curriculum leadership.

I have known about Anna for many years. I have always seen her as a very respected First Nations community member. Her mom was also a respected First Nations educator. Anna carries herself with a dignity that is characteristic of Elders in our First

Nations community. She has strength of character that portrays deep respect for traditions, family and language. During our initial visit I was so deeply impressed with the depth of Anna's experience and reflections on those experiences. Anna illuminated the phenomenon of interest far more deeply than I would have expected through her calm and methodical yet reflective narrative of her life and professional experience.

Elaine married into a First Nations community at a very young age. As a young mom, she journeyed through the early days of Indian Control of Indian Education with her spouse and community. Together, they committed to developing their community's education system. Elaine developed a strong allegiance to community Elders who she sees as the knowledge and vision keepers. She returned to school with a young family and earned a graduate degree in education. While raising a family on reserve, Elaine served as principal and director of education at the band and tribal council levels.

I knew Elaine as an activist ahead of her time, always advocating for First Nations autonomy in education. She was known as an innovator and someone willing to take risks. Elaine was an early product of the Indian Teacher Education Program and she always maintained respect for and allegiance to her Indigenous teacher counterparts. She has a strong revolutionary character and believes that her calling as an Indigenous educator was a call to serve to realize the potential in Indigenous epistemologies and pedagogies that contribute to strong Indigenous student identity and a school system that perpetuates the ideals of Indigenous peoples.

Kenneth is a northern Cree-Métis man who proudly speaks the Cree language. He had served in a variety of community service roles before earning his bachelor's degree in education. He quickly rose through the ranks as school administrator. Kenneth holds

a graduate degree in education. He became a superintendent of education with a provincial board, a role that he held for much of his career. Kenneth served on many provincial committees and initiatives, becoming a strong representative of northern and Indigenous peoples. Kenneth spent many years in provincial and school division leadership in Indigenous education.

Kenneth has a great sense of humour and is very personable. He is widely known for his educational and leadership expertise. Despite his high profile roles, he always remained close to his community and Indigenous people in general. He could easily oscillate between provincial and First Nations education. He has always been a strong advocate for Indigenous language and culture in education and for the presence of Indigenous teachers in band-controlled and provincial schools.

In the interest of committing to my role in contributing to knowledge generation alongside the study participants, I add to the biographic information that I presented in the prologue. I graduated with a B.Ed. from the Indian Teacher Education Program at the University of Saskatchewan. I later achieved a Master's degree in education, also from the University of Saskatchewan. Following a short teaching assignment in the band-controlled education system, I began work with a large urban board where I have served as a teacher, school administrator, curriculum coordinator and currently as superintendent of education. I have long been involved in community development initiatives and philanthropic organizations local and nationally. I have also participated in many local and national committees and panels aiming to articulate more effective processes and policies in Indigenous education. I nurture my Indigenous identity by participating in

community celebrations and ceremonies, maintaining a presence in my traditional territory and building my cultural arts skills.

## **Research Ethics**

My master's thesis entitled, *A Case Study Of The Ethical Dilemmas Experienced By Three Aboriginal Educators*, (Martell, 1998) focused heavily on Indigenous research ethics. That study relates to this current study in that it shared a cautious approach to knowledge acquisition driven by respect and ambiguity. What I learned from that experience was that while steps can be taken to ensure ethical considerations are addressed technically, the most significant ethical consideration is the methodological and theoretical constructs that Indigenous people or communities are invited into. Since that research experience, I have come to know that deference to the Indigenous peoples and communities mostly requires consideration of the manner in which the researcher relates to Indigenous community and research intent is ultimately the currency that proves or disproves an ethical approach.

In addition to applying for and receiving approval from the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board, I provided many opportunities for the participants to understand and participate in this research. Initial conversations with all of the interested members of the identified population aimed to describe my research approach and intent. I aimed to ensure that no mystery remained in terms the product of this research. Once the research participants were selected, I continued to work toward my objective of full disclosure by providing the discussion questions in advance of the initial visit and the first and second interviews. I also sent a copy of the transcripts from the first and second interviews to the participants for their review. I shared a copy of the

individual depictions and composite depiction with the participants and, again, invited their feedback and approval. The participants also received a draft of this document at the same time that my dissertation committee received the document for review. My objective was to ensure that the research participants had many opportunities to see the process unfold to ensure full disclosure.

I have extensively explicated the rationale for my selection of a theoretical and methodological approach. With confidence that those decisions mitigated theoretical distortion of the contributions of three individuals, their families and communities, I was most vigilant to ensure that, as Kovach (2009) cautioned, “Simply because a researcher is Indigenous (or following an Indigenous framework) does not automatically translate into community trust. Trust needs to be earned internally” (p. 147). In the case of this research, trust with the community of Indigenous leaders did not hinge on theoretical or methodological choices as much as recognizing the value of their experiences and ensuring that their experiences authentically contributed to meaning making.

The participants understood the objective of the research and chose to share stories of family break-ups, residential school experiences and identity struggles. They also shared humorous accounts of battling with Indian Affairs, heart-wrenching accounts of loss and inspiring accounts of achieving victories with their communities. Adherence to ethical standards was demonstrated through a litany of participant check-ins and opportunities for recall. Actualization of a study guided by “...miyo... [or] ...goodness...,” as Kovach (2009, p. 147) uses the Cree conceptualization of the manner in which the researcher is called to act, is measured on outcomes rather than inputs. Good intent cannot be measured through a research proposal but through the length of the

relationship, the depth of the contribution and the manner in which the outcomes resonate with those that have shaped them.

### **Data Collection**

Once the research participants had been identified, I forwarded each of the participants an introductory letter and a copy of the informed consent form (Appendix 5). I initially met with each of the participants for approximately one hour. During that time I answered any questions that the research participants had of me. I also described the research motivation, process and timelines. I told them about myself, and what I hoped to achieve in the study. I reviewed the expectations for participation and the informed consent forms. Having received confirmation of participation, I presented the research participants with tobacco as is appropriate protocol in the exchange of knowledge in the shared tradition of the research participants and myself.

The research-participants were invited to participate in two more data gathering exercises, each of which was digitally recorded. The second meeting was used to delve more deeply into the research questions (Appendix 6) and foster dialogue. The third meeting was used to clarify any questions that arose as I transcribed the conversations from the second visit and to initiate further dialogue based on my initial reaction to the texts. My goal was to ensure that the research-participants had "...an opportunity to tell one's story to a point of natural closing" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 39). Following the third visit and extended interview with each, I felt that I had reached that point as I began to sense that the participants had begun to reinforce their earlier narratives rather than surfacing new knowledge or responses to my questions, despite my efforts to craft new and challenging prompts to examine experience with reflective hindsight.

The participants were invited to review the first and second set of transcripts of my interviews with them and to correct information, contribute additional information or edit their initial contributions. The later stages of the heuristic research process, the individual and composite depictions were also shared with the participants for their review and feedback. Those stages will be discussed in more detail in chapter four.

### **Interview Schedule**

I subscribed to the notion that "...the more structured the interview the less flexibility and power the research participant has in sharing his or her story... (Kovach, 2009, p. 99). I have extensive experience interviewing prospective employees and administrative candidates in my role as superintendent of education. My work entails the ability to talk to parents, Elders, community leaders and community members, always modeling active listening and the ability to draw out the best from sometimes-reluctant contributors. I developed an interview schedule that I felt would contribute to active dialogue and precipitate ever more complex reflections. I was pleased that the interview schedule allowed the dialogue to follow the contours of the participants' narrative without unnecessary allegiance to the questions. The questions were a portal to valued narrative and analysis and they served that purpose well.

### **Data Analysis**

The stages of heuristic research integrate data collection and analysis as the researcher gathers, organizes and makes meaning from the data. The products that flow from the transcripts are at the same time additional text and analysis. That process plays the part off the whole and the whole off the part, all the while bringing the researcher into closer investment with the research-participants and generating new insights from the

relationship that become a new level of data closer to the essence and interpretation of the experience.

The heuristic research process relies on check-ins and feedback from the participants. It was important to me to heed Kovacs (2009) advice that “Indigenous research frameworks shift the power of the researcher in controlling the research process and outcome. Methodologically, this means gathering knowledge that allows for voice and representational involvement in interpreting findings” (Kovach, 2009, p. 82).

### **Interview Transcripts**

Following my reading, response, rest and return to each of the transcripts, I sequenced the events of each participant to tell the story of each (Moustakas, 1990). That stage had two significant purposes, to assemble a story that honoured the contributions of the research-participants and to ensure that the researcher intimately knew each story. That is integral to the process as the researcher was the one responsible for drawing out themes and constructing composites. Throughout the construction of the individual stories, I entered into a reflective process that delivered on the heuristic research promise of personal growth and capitalizing on the fact that the researcher shared experiences with the participants and was a common thread throughout the many conversations and parts of the process.

With the conversations transcribed, attention turned to drawing the words and ideas of the research participants together into a format that was useful in making sense of the data in answering the research questions. Heuristic research compels the researcher to be vulnerable in reflecting on the experiences of the participants and to use the confluence of those experiences and the researcher’s response to those experiences to



deepen meaning (Moustakas, 1990). In the initial stage of analysis, my intent was to run my hands over the words and begin to view the words as meaning and intent. I certainly had emotional responses to the participants' stories during the interview and transcription process, but the transcript review was an opportunity to re-familiarize myself with their experiences and my response to those experiences. Up to the point of conducting the interviews, the priority was access. I knew the respondents more through reputation than relationship. Through the presentation of their experiences in Indigenous educational leadership, I came to a deep knowledge of and respect for those marvelous human beings.

The task of reviewing the transcripts was to access qualities and themes as well as my initial insights. While reviewing the transcripts of the first and second recorded interview with each of the three participants, I first deleted any residual text that didn't resonate with me. This often included my own lengthy preambles to questions or sidebar conversations that I had with the participants. I then noted qualities and themes while reacting to the experience of the interview and recording my insight. I challenged myself to identify characteristics of the experience of Indigenous educational leaders. I looked for clues pointing to unique knowledge and inventive processes that they employed in pursuing their objectives in consultation. The cues that I kept before me as I reviewed the transcripts were (a) knowledge generated from the margins; (b) revolutionary entrepreneurialism; (c) what Indigenous educational leaders know and do; (d) better-than-survival strategies; (e) *kîkway ka osihtahk* (to improvise); (f) opportunities that have arisen; and (g) the genesis of knowledge and skills that have developed within a context in between. Those prompts helped to focus my review of the transcripts. I was motivated by my desire to honour what Indigenous educational leaders knew and did. I

was guided by my desire to better understand the experience of generating skills and knowledge in the margins.

Each time I read through a transcript I identified notable qualities that I later used in the individual depictions, composite depiction, exemplary portraits and creative synthesis. Initial comments were identified in plain text. Each time I re-read a transcript, I listened for the evocative elements that stood out from the rest. Throughout my second review of the transcripts, I further delineated selected text by bolding words or sections. During the third run-through, I bolded the text and aligned the text to the right margin. Fourth order qualities were in red font and aligned to the left margin. Fifth order text was in red font, aligned with the left margin and bolded. The result of the transcript review was a visual representation of the refinement of analysis with my reactions embedded. I chose not to compile a table of the most distilled text and use those terms to motivate the subsequent stages of the heuristic research but rather to go back to the multi-layered text and enlist it in separate analyses that will be described before each subsequent section. Instead, I compiled a binder for each of the participants with the raw transcripts and the reviewed transcripts that I used for each of the following stages. A sample of a raw transcript and the same transcript reviewed with five layers of analysis is presented in Appendix 8.

It is important to affirm that where an analytical method such as the constant comparative method might distill transcripts to key concepts tied back to the text, my review of the transcripts left me with the multi-layered texts complete with quotations, concepts and reflections. Analysis was in the individual depictions, composite depiction, exemplary portraits and creative synthesis. Each time I created another level of heuristic

analysis, I returned to the multi-layered texts and used those texts as a resource to meet the purpose of each stage. Those texts included my reflections, which also accomplished weaving my experience and influence in with that of the participants. My binder of transcripts and reviewed transcripts was often referenced and integral to the process. The trade off to the absence of a list of key concepts was that the text that the participants endorsed underpinned each stage and, I believe, added validity to the narrative pieces.

### **Individual Depictions**

Constructing individual depictions moved beyond individual stories to a distilled version of the stories that benefited from the reflection and interpretation of the researcher. Those individual depictions were each a narrative constructed from the ordering of the stories from the transcripts. Those depictions were arrived at through line-by-line analysis of the transcripts to identify emerging patterns. That stage developed a dialogue between the researcher, the coded data and the knowledge about what it meant to have those experiences, in that context. The entire process of writing and validating each individual depiction was repeated with each of the three research-participants. The first participant was put on hold while the process was repeated for the second participant, and so on. That absence from the process completed with the first research-participant also offered a pause from immersion into one story that allowed new insights to emerge when apart from the depiction that held the researcher's attention through a lengthy process.

Each participant was asked to review his or her individual depiction. Feedback received from the participants was used to refine the individual depictions to better represent the experience of each research-participant.

## **Composite Depiction**

I immersed myself in the revised individual depictions, similar in process to immersion in the individual stories, except that my task was to search for insights into connections among themes across the three individual depictions. That step involved mapping the process to demonstrate and evidence the arrival at thematic convergence and the development of new understandings across emergent themes. I again retreated, repeated and recorded my insights.

I then developed a composite depiction, drawing out universal qualities and themes. Due to the small number of research participants, all were viewed as exemplary portraits that characterized the group as a whole. In the language of interpretive phenomenological analysis, “the specifics are unique, but they are hung on what is shared and communal” (Smith, et al., 2009, p. 38). The composite depiction was accomplished with the help of evidence from the individual depictions, the results of the cross-depiction mapping exercise and the universal qualities and themes. The composite depiction represented the essence of the experience for all of the research-participants.

## **Exemplary Portraits**

Exemplary portraits are evidence-based narratives derived from the transcripts that serve to validate the individual and composite depictions. Where the individual and composite depictions narrated their experiences, the exemplary portraits told of the detail of their journeys. That detail served as a reference point to validate and anchor the themes that had emerged that was ultimately grounded in the transcripts. Following the development of the exemplary portraits, I tested each against the original data. Once the

exemplary portraits were tested against the data, I again retreated from the work, returned to it, repeated the process and recorded further insights.

### **Creative Synthesis**

I then developed a creative synthesis, an original integration of the material that reflected my intuition, imagination and personal knowledge of meanings and essences of the experience. The creative synthesis “...invites a recognition of tacit-intuitive awareness of the researcher, knowledge that has been incubating, over months through processes of immersion, illumination, and explication of the phenomenon investigated” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 52). The creative synthesis is an “...original integration of the material that reflects the researcher’s intuition, imagination, and personal knowledge of meanings and essences of the experience” (Moustakas, p. 50). The depiction must resonate with the researcher and the research-participants.

The steps of heuristic research gave way to the emergence of a creative articulation of the experience of Indigenous educational leadership. The process that led to the creative synthesis benefited from the depth of the stories, the reflection and insight and the creation of a composite. The result was a value-added reflection that benefits from careful adherence to process, honouring of the contributions of the participants and dedication to listening to one’s own inner voice and that of the research-participants.

### **Representation**

The findings of the study were written with deference to the use of verbatim quotations, evidence of the progression and distillation of themes and continued referencing of the guiding considerations that prepared to receive the contributions of the

research participants, including tacit knowledge and inventive applications of that knowledge. Before addressing how the considerations listed above were woven into the manuscript, it was necessary to outline the structure of the manuscript. That structure was based on the processes of heuristic research.

The research question was answered by providing a well-evidenced portrait of the "... individual depictions, a comprehensive depiction, two or three exemplary individual portraits, and a creative synthesis" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 54). It was the individual themes drawn from the words of the research-participants that formed the basis of all of the various components. While the current transcripts of the dialogue evidenced the themes on the one hand, the dialogue also evidenced the overall experience of the research participants and the researcher. The result was a dual use of the data with a single weaving together of the depictions and portraits that responded to the research question and the experience of growth that resulted from an intermingling with the question. The question guided both the analysis and the growth. The craft of the representation is to present the findings in a matter that tells a personal story, collective stories and a story of reclaiming and growth.

The manuscript models a three-part process with an evidence-based strand that depicts the progression from curiosity to process, a strand that evidences the progression from individual stories to creative synthesis and a strand that evidences the growth of the researcher throughout the process. Those three components ultimately contributed to the story of capacity and motivation of Indigenous educational leadership. The result was "...much more substantial, and much more discursive, than the results section of a typical quantitative report" (Smith, et al., 2009, p. 109).

## **Conclusion**

The thinking about this study and the structuring of process to accomplish my intent resided within a complex but unified arena characterized by deference to people, our shared experiences and our interpretations. Heuristic research offered a fluid structure commensurate with the bricolage and tailor made for the inquirer desirous of journeying with the study participants to demonstrate allegiance to the participants in claiming the phenomenon and participating as a peer in meaning making for the good of the group and for others that might follow.

## CHAPTER 4: PRESENTING THE DATA

The first time I read Moustakas' (1990) *Heuristic Research: Design, Methodology and Applications*, the complexity of the process appeared daunting. What drew me to the heuristic research methodology, though, was the prospect of an honest brokering of participant and researcher voice, past the fallacy of objectivity. The process of narrowing to achieve richness, as in a story that has been told over and over again for generations, offered an appreciative examination of the phenomenon of interest as the foundation of newly articulated knowledge. All experience has the potential for richness but the heuristic process supports participants and researcher to exploit opportunity to view the usual through an appreciative lens and come to know what was hidden.

The only way that I could conceive of making meaning was through deference to the rightful owners and checking repeatedly that I was *getting it right* in understanding and applying what was being offered to me. I thought it inspiring to imagine the honour that would be brought to those that offered their stories so selflessly, that they would enjoy the reward of having something beautiful presented to them as reciprocity for their generosity. At the outset, I could not imagine what that beautiful something would be but I imagined bringing sustenance in return for guiding me in the hunt. I imagined bringing medicine in return for teaching about sacred plants. I imagined singing a song in return for receiving ceremonial teachings. The stages of heuristic research empowered me to commit to working with the participants' stories, not to make something of them, for they were already whole, but to reciprocate by critically thinking about meaning and intent and by honouring those that offered their experiences as teachings. My learning could only be validated with appropriate deference to my teachers. As each stage narrowed, my



clarity of understanding grew. Analysis was not to try and find something that either wasn't present or wasn't intended. Narrowing to a creative synthesis was about how I was changed and what I had to offer in exchange for that enlightenment.

### **Overview**

This chapter begins by revisiting the goals that I set out to achieve as well as the strategies that describe how I intended to realize those goals. Born of my notion of a decolonizing heuristic, I introduce *Trickster text* as a mechanism employed in critical reflection. I then present an overview of how I initially worked with the transcripts that precipitated the subsequent stages of the heuristic research process.

### **Goals**

The primary purpose of this study was to achieve a deepened understanding of the phenomenon of interest: the experience of Indigenous educational leadership. Specifically, I set out to put words to the tacit by identifying knowledge and skills present in the experiences of the participants. Ultimately, I aimed to achieve a raised consciousness concerning the phenomenon of interest and, in turn, offer that glimpse of raised understanding and awareness to the reader.

## Strategies

Figure 1. Reflective Heuristic

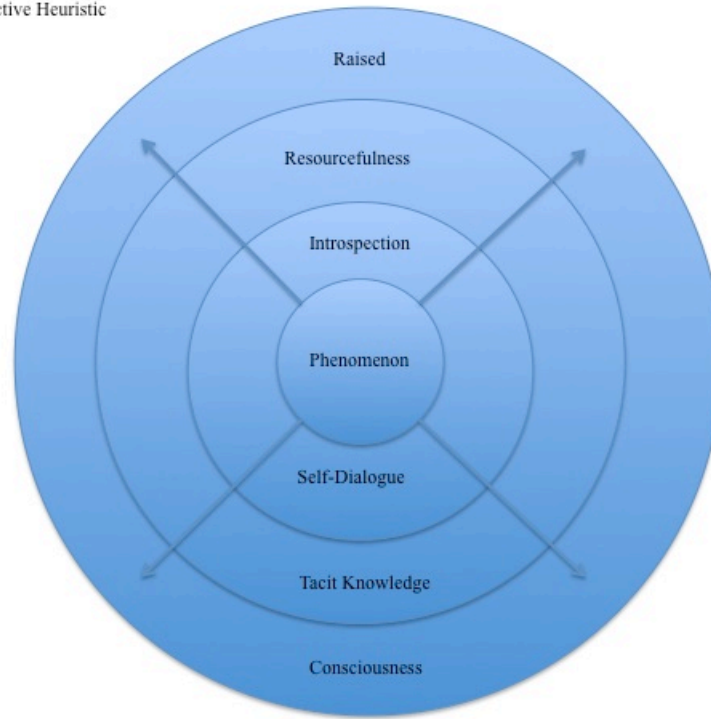


Figure 1. A Reflective Heuristic. The phenomenon of interest is at the centre of the diagram. The second concentric circle represents looking inward to understand the phenomenon through introspection and self-dialogue. The third concentric circle represents resourcefulness identified in tacit knowledge. The final stage is raised consciousness achieved as a result of the process.

Throughout this chapter, I call on my influences in the bricolage and tacit knowledge as portals to my deepened understanding explored through introspection and self-dialogue. A characteristic of Indigenous knowledge is deference to knowledge from within the individual (Ermine, 1995). Deference to knowledge mined from within caused me to conceive of the notion of a *Trickster-bricolage* as a reflective heuristic useful in data analysis. Characteristics of the Trickster figure in North American Indigenous cultures have been applied to Western interpretive paradigms such as in Vizenor's

trickster hermeneutics (Pulitano, 2003). In Indigenous consciousness, “as acts of imagination, trickster stories have always aimed at liberating people’s minds, forcing them into self-recognition and knowledge, and keeping them alert to their own power to heal” (Pulitano, 2003, p. 147). A Trickster-bricolage is a landscape of that which is known and unknown, and where the mystery extends to the reason for engaging or not engaging with that environment. Simply, tacit is the knowledge that lies about in various forms, as is the motivation for picking up and assembling the pieces. In a roundabout way, the Trickster provokes the seeker to the next useful bit in assembling a way forward. The decolonizing heuristic helps to bring clarity to the landscape of colonized ingenuity by providing a roadmap of sorts. The heuristic is always focused on the phenomenon of interest. Introspection and self-dialogue yield resourcefulness held in tacit abeyance. The churn of the vortex of influence and objective ultimately achieve raised consciousness for the researcher and his peers. The reflective heuristic was conceived of throughout the development of the stages of heuristic research and helped in the development and analysis of each stage accordingly. The heuristic also served as the foundation for the interpretive model presented in chapter five.

### **Trickster Text**

While the conceptualization of a Trickster figure is prominent in literature, Indigenous researchers are increasingly merging their own cultural understanding of the Trickster in interpretive methodological frameworks. Of this complex conceptualization, Archibald (2008) explains:

The English word "trickster" is a poor one because it cannot portray the diverse range of ideas that First Nations associate with the Trickster, who sometimes is like a magician, and enchanter, an absurd prankster, or a Shaman, who sometimes is a shape shifter, and often takes on human characteristics. Trickster is a

transformative figure, one whose transformations often use humour, satire, self mocking, and absurdity to carry good lessons.... Trickster often gets into trouble by ignoring cultural rules and practices or by giving sway to the negative aspects of 'humanness,' such as vanity, greed, selfishness, and foolishness. Trickster seems to learn lessons the hard way and sometimes not at all. At the same time, Trickster has the ability to do good things for others and is sometimes like a powerful spiritual being and given much respect. (p. 5)

Despite the complexity of the conceptualization of the Trickster, her/his attributes are familiar to Indigenous peoples who have a foundation in their cultural narrative. In research methodology, Trickster is often employed "...to gain understandings, challenging and comforting me just like a critical friend" (Archibald, 2008, p. 6). O'Riley and Cole (2011) engage Coyote and Raven in dialogue regarding the protection of Indigenous intellectual property. Trickster normalizes learning from dissonance. Moore (2012) identifies the cognitive latitude that accompanies the discipline of the Trickster in the statement, "In the trickster space where Indigenous and Eurocentric/Western world views come together, I realize there are no recipes, no rules, and no step-by-step directions in the work to bring these to knowledge systems together" (p. 330). Trickster as provocation to think and act is consistent with the manner in which *wîsahkêcâhk* is employed in this study.

Trickster text is the use of a familiar metaphor to take back control of Indigenous heritage (Smith, 1999) in this research. As Kincheloe and Berry (2004) muse, "no essentialized bounded self can access the intellectual potential offered by epiphanies of difference or triggered by an ostensibly 'insignificant' insight" (p. 38). I arrived at the realization that a seemingly insignificant tug on rationalization might just have been the Indigenous conceptualization of the Trickster figure provoking my passion for answers all along, without revealing her/his identity to me. A friend and colleague, D.

Kanêwiyakihô (personal communication, January 22, 2016), provided a plausible explanation for my struggle to find a manner of expressing the ingenuity of the bricolage without complete allegiance to the theoretical baggage. Indeed, the bricolage celebrates knowledge realized through an amalgam. Kanêwiyakihô (2016) posited that the act of perpetually scrounging the landscape, picking up caste aside bits and transforming them into something useful, was akin to *wisahkêcâhk*'s task to sustain creation to which s/he had been relegated. Just as *wisahkêcâhk* imbued all living things with gifts through her/his storied existence, s/he contributed to the composite of beauty and perfection. Through her/his deal making and manipulation, s/he gave and took away, setting in place realities that exist today. As the participants traversed their landscapes, picking up and fixing and making anew, so too was *wisahkêcâhk*'s task unglamorous but necessary, and both left things better than before.

Kanêwiyakihô's offering of this teaching metaphor helped me to adopt an organizing theory familiar to Indigenous peoples and plausible as an analytical aid. The objective, though, was never to convince anyone, the participants or the reader, that their task was to sustain creation by following in the footsteps of *wisahkêcâhk*. *Wisahkêcâhk*'s voice, for me, emerged at the right time to spur me on to better and deeper reflection on the texts and my reaction to the texts. *Wisahkêcâhk*'s voice was partly my alter ego that allowed me to push myself in analysis. It was also partly my recognition of the gap between known and unknown, conscious and sub-conscious. Mostly, *wisahkêcâhk*'s voice served as a decolonizing heuristic that established linkages among ancient wisdoms, rich histories, contemporary experiences and better futures. Van Manen (2002) noted:

A peculiar change takes place in the person who starts to write and enters the text: the self retreats or steps back as it were, without completely stepping out of its social, historical, biographic being. This is similar to what happens when we read a story. One traverses a world that is not one's own. Here everything is undetermined. Everything is possible. Just as one is no longer oneself when one loses oneself in a novel. So the writer, in writing, seems no longer quite this or that personal self. In a certain sense, the writer becomes depersonalized or a neutral self – a self who produces scripture. (p. 3)

*Wisahkêcâhk*'s voice allowed me to balance entering the text with retreat. I could view the image of the narrative with a new lens, immersed in the text while conscious of how the text shaped me. In the spirit of *wisahkêcâhk*, the voice is sometimes provocative, crass, leading or endorsing but always focused on having me look more deeply at myself and work harder to realize what the participants offered so selflessly. *Wisahkêcâhk* was always manipulating for another purpose, and it was that purpose that I listen for most.

### **Individual Depictions**

In heuristic research, an individual depiction aims to portray the experience of the participant (Moustakas, 1990). The individual depiction validates the texts by offering participants opportunity to affirm that the depiction accurately reflects their experience with the phenomenon. The individual depictions tell of the experience of working in education on behalf of an Indigenous community through my retelling of their stories. Individual depictions "...may include descriptive narrative, examples, ... verbatim exemplary material, ... verbatim conversations, poetry and artwork" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 50). I chose to use the voice of the participants and narrate their stories in an assumed first person. I came to this mode of presentation as a manner of representing the text as I heard them. That is not to say that I simply repeated what I heard. From transcripts to individual depictions was an arduous journey of cutting and pasting themes and ideas that

emerged from the transcript review process. I heard the text as narrative and out of respect for the participants I chose to represent the text as narrative. The complexity was inherent in the experiences so I had no desire to make complex the telling of the experience of the phenomenon from each of the participants' point of view. The risk was distorting their voices and alienating the participants. The benefit was presenting the narratives with accurate voice. This held the potential to instill trust in the participants by demonstrating that I had really listened and was able to reflect the richness of their narrative with respect just as one would tell of the honours and exploits of an Elder. The goal was affirmation, neither of embellishment nor diminishment but of an honest portrayal.

Writing the individual depictions was a labour of love. I was so inspired by the participants' stories that I was anxious to try to capture their journeys, influences, struggles and advice in a succinct and honest portrayal. Although not in agreement, I employed a blended first and second person narrative approach. I used the more formal indefinite pronoun "one" to depict a first person telling of an account rather than use the typical "I" which I felt sounded boastful when the participants clearly never presented as such. This allowed a personal telling without making the participants the centre of attention. I also used the second person "you" and "yours" to refer to the group rather than the individual. Writing in an assumed first person forced me to reference each idea by the transcripts to ensure that the depictions were grounded in evidence. In presenting the depictions to the participants, they were invited to consider whether the voice represented their experiences and their reflections upon those experiences. I also chose to present the depictions based on telling of experiences, not telling the experiences. This

was the difference between reporting that one had gone on a walk in the snow and reporting how it felt to walk in the snow. The individual depiction tells the story of the response to their experiences and, therefore, weaves the second level on interpretation into the process (the first level being the transcript review and drawing out themes).

I was pleased that the participants only offered small editorial corrections but chose to express their affirmation of the individual depictions. Each of the depictions that follow is presented in its entirety, as this is the first opportunity of the reader to meet the participants.

### **Individual Depiction of Anna**

The goal of working on behalf of an Indigenous community in education was to make contributions to the education sector based on traditional Indigenous teachings and protocols. It was crucial that Indigenous students were able to experience their cultures in all aspects of their school experience. It was also important for Indigenous students to experience Indigenous people at all levels of the education sector. Ultimately, the presence of Indigenous voice and participation in the education sector contributed to fair and equitable resourcing of Indigenous schools, resulting in improved learning outcomes for Indigenous students.

Our Elders who fought for our rights and participation in society were traditional, respectful, consistent and hard-working people. It was that type of leadership that was required to advance equity for Indigenous students and communities. There were many contemporary role models who have achieved great accomplishments in the Western education system while maintaining strong ties to their culture and tradition. Emulating those individuals and taking responsibility for leadership and service to communities would ultimately make gains for Indigenous peoples in education. It was important to be confident and to expect equal participation and outcome for Indigenous students and communities. Our rightful place needed to be taken, as it would not be given willingly.

Achieving improved participation and outcomes for Indigenous students was also part of fulfilling the Treaty promise. As a pact with the Crown to foster harmonious relationships, we had a responsibility to do our part to achieve fulfillment of the Treaties. That could be achieved by advocating for voice and participations of Indigenous peoples in the education sector. Our communities fought for *Indian Control of Indian Education*. That was a process that continued



and would be achieved through many small victories on behalf of each student, just as much as it would be achieved through political or legal avenues.

It was an honour to be called to serve on behalf of one's community. Being called to serve was recognition of one's gifts and talents. Genuine service was undertaken with humility and tenacity. Achieving victories on behalf of the community was not about self-aggrandizement but about the honour of achieving accomplishments as a part of a community. For those fortunate enough to be called, it was their responsibility to build the capacity of those around them by freely sharing their gifts and talents.

It was always a steep learning curve to undertake a new challenge. The most effective means to an end was to assess the skills and abilities of those around you and leverage their gifts toward achieving a favourable outcome. A victory for one was a victory for all. Achieving great things was often a result of being in the right place at the right time and benefiting from the work of those who had come before you.

Our communities were experiencing hurt resulting from the subordination inherent in colonization. It was incumbent upon those of us who have benefited from strong role models and a supportive context to answer the call to serve our communities in whatever way we could. Even if a task seemed daunting, it was important to think of the children that would benefit from achieving a favourable outcome. Without our support, there would continue to be suicides and children falling through the gaps. We worked on behalf of the ones who had been lost. It was important to be adaptive and to develop the skills required to meet the needs of the community. The greater the demand, the greater the opportunity to develop one's skills. Sometimes you didn't realize you possessed certain skills until you were called to use them.

Serving one's community came with personal sacrifice. Working towards equity in Indigenous education always pitted one against the majority. There was also the need to continually try to master the dominant system while trying to Indigenize the system. It could be lonely work as in many instances Indigenous people were far outnumbered by non-Indigenous people. At times you were looked upon as the expert on Indigenous issues but when you challenged the status quo your Indigenous experience could be marginalized or dismissed. Sometimes it took great personal sacrifice to serve the needs of the community. That may have meant that family dynamics, one's physical location or other interests and career opportunities might have needed to take a backseat to acting on behalf of the community. When you were representing people, there was a heavy load to bear, as you were accountable to the people.

Sometimes the needs of certain communities were just too overwhelming. Those challenges were particularly daunting when you saw children suffer. One had to be ready to take on these extreme challenges and to assess whether one's

particular skill-set was matched to the needs of the community. Sometimes you had to cut your losses and determine that your skills could be better put to use elsewhere or at another time. Still, the drive to achieve improved conditions for children could cause you to persist through great obstacles. Sometimes one would question whether they were the right person for the job. It was at times like that when you had to persist and gather allies to strengthen the fight. Sometimes it helped just to get real mad! Regrouping and devising new strategies would give you enough strength to get back in the trenches and fight another day.

The most effective strategy was to seek change from within. Gathering committed allies and working together on behalf of the ideals and aspirations of the community could achieve great things. It was important to be aware of your skills and to know when to employ various strategies based on the context. Even if your typical demeanor was not one of strength and fight, it was important to adopt the persona if that was what the situation called for. Boardroom deliberations warranted a different tone than when interacting with one's family or peers. When you entered into an adversarial environment, you sometimes needed to adopt an adversarial approach. At the end of the day, it was important to regroup and to leave the adversarial tone at the boardroom table so that it did not come to characterize you. That work was really about relationships and nurturing. The same type of skills that worked with individual students would serve you well in most contexts, despite the fact that at times a battle called for a fight. The key was an unrelenting focus on the outcome and the pursuit of resources on behalf of the communities that you represented.

It was important to always be prepared and to support your argument with data and statistics. Careful preparation of a proposal with evidence and forecasts would help to achieve the intended outcome. The powerbrokers understood certain strategies and sometimes it was important to play by their rules. Still, strategic planning could help any community effort and the skill to translate community voice and vision into a plan for the future would help the community clarify their interests and mount an effective campaign. It was important to be fully informed and to know your opposition, whether they admitted they were your opposition or not. Entering into the boardroom was never a time to be afraid. You had to look your opponent in the eye and move forward with confidence. That confidence came from the fact that you were representing genuine need and that children would benefit from your efforts. Prior to going to meetings it was useful to find out as much as you could about who would be at the table and to do any lobbying necessary behind-the-scenes. If you could pull some strings elsewhere then it was important to do so. You did not only need to know how to lobby but who to lobby and who to stay away from. It was also important to be able to read people to know whom to trust. Trust among people could help to build relationships and alliances that would serve your work well.

In addition to negotiating skills, it was important to have significant foundational knowledge in the sector. That way, if someone provided you misinformation, you

were able to challenge them and ensure that they didn't continue to take advantage of your perceived lack of knowledge. Knowledge is power and you have to have your facts straight and your foundational information compiled. Experience as a teacher helped to add authenticity to one's argument in the education sector. At times, those that you were negotiating with took offense to your challenge but you had to stick to your guns.

Effective advocates also had foundational qualities of fortitude and leadership. Our Elders had those qualities and achieved great accomplishments despite insurmountable odds. Few people had the drive and passion of our predecessors who fought on our behalf. In order to genuinely have that tenacity and drive one had to be exposed to those qualities during their formative years. Still, it was incumbent upon dedicated leaders to help to develop those qualities in those around them. Encouragement went a long way and if you drew attention to people's competence instead of their shortcomings, they were more likely to adopt that willingness to persist and that drive to work hard on behalf of the community.

Racism was alive and well in the education sector. While it was a limiter on progress, it could also be a motivator as one tried to eradicate racism and establish a level playing field. It was important to keep in mind that the lack of equity for Indigenous peoples in education was a result of institutional racism and racist policy and legislation. It was important to recognize and resist the racist undertones that were ever present in working towards improved outcomes for Indigenous students and equitable resourcing.

Many great things came from ideas and innovations. Sharing and exchanging ideas helped to foster a problem-solving environment. When you got an idea and put it out into the public domain, it belonged to everyone. It was those pooled ideas that were more likely to generate solutions. For Indigenous peoples, innovations were often an amalgam of traditional teachings and contemporary educational and leadership theory. Indigenous educational leaders were particularly poised to pursue solutions with those multiple influences because they had developed their skills within a context of multiple influences.

It was important to measure victories by the influence that they had on the community rather than the prowess that one had as an individual. As an Indigenous person, broader society expected you to be twice as good before they would recognize your achievements. The greatest recognition of achievements was in recognizing that one had put their best towards the fight and had accomplished something on behalf of the children. It did no good to come to the table thinking that one is *just an Indian* and, therefore, not worthy of great accomplishments. It was precisely because one was Indigenous that great things could be accomplished. No victory was worth yielding one's Indigenous identity.

As well as contributing to the betterment of communities, those victories also contributed to one's personal and professional growth. Victories were defined by

dignity for all. The victory was not about how you felt after the fact but about how you felt when you could look back on the community and see the progress. What you put in is what you got out and when you worked hard on behalf of the communities, they would give you the appropriate reward.

### **Individual Depiction of Elaine**

Working on behalf of an Indigenous community to enhance participation and outcomes in the education sector afforded one the opportunity to build knowledge and skills. For the privilege of building that knowledge and skills, there came a time when one was ready to step out into a leadership position on behalf of the community. It was important to be judicious in the counsel that one offered and to ensure that one was always representing the position of the community. You knew when you had earned the right to speak. Humility teaches when to listen and respect teachers went to act. Deference and humility was a better servant than the wise consultant.

There was always a question as to whether one could actually represent the community. At what point did an outsider become an insider? Identity was better defined by what was in one's heart rather than how one looked. Genuine acceptance into a community was marked by when the community allowed one to work on their behalf and express their appreciation when one is able to contribute to small victories. It was the Elders and the knowledge keepers of the community who ultimately represented the community and deserved the real prominence. Genuine service was to be able to tap into the inherent community intellect and let it be your guide.

The community witnessed your commitment in your longevity of presence and service. Acceptance was when the community asked you to act on their behalf. The *Indian Control of Indian Education* era caused communities to seek out capacity and commission them to fight the battles to bring education home. There was a reason the young were warriors with their bravado and naïveté serving well to stave off fear. Over the years, the battles got harder and the skills became more refined and one became interwoven in the community where their battle was yours, and yours, theirs.

At the outset of the journey there was no vision of grandeur or visions of making history. When there were expectations, you stepped up. One had no idea where all the small battles would lead as that can only be assessed with hindsight. The revolutionary spirit of the time called on all of those that could contribute to the battle to do so. Our Elders did their part and it was time for us to do ours. Some got weary of the battle but leaders thrived on that challenge and were only weary when others around them lost heart. Those that were there at the beginning of the journey would always be kindred spirits as they were forged in the same fires.

There were high expectations of the original cohort that set out to achieve *Indian Control of Indian Education*. School improvement was part of it but there was also proving the political point that Indigenous people could run their own affairs. Although there were those that questioned whether the movement could achieve its intended purpose, the majority was willing to take risks and work at it for the long haul.

Indigenous communities thrived on traditional knowledge that sustained them for millennia. The single most important task of acting on behalf of the community was to understand that knowledge and to ensure that the community valued it enough to want to sustain it through a contemporary education system. When the Elders implored you to help teach the children their history to ensure that they gained pride in their identity, you knew you have achieved a mandate on behalf of the community. The manner in which that mandate was achieved was primarily by breaking the mold that was status quo education. The status quo was not able to foster success among Indigenous children so there was little of the existing system that needed to be salvaged. The mission was to find ways to bring Indigenous knowledge into the system for the success of Indigenous students and the betterment of the entire education sector. Indigenous children should never have to feel that their identity is subordinate. Learning improvement only follows knowledge of their histories in their communities and families. Sometimes it took someone from outside of the community to make connections and demonstrate how community knowledge could be situated in curriculum.

In a newfound community where one took roots and raised a family, the motivation took on new meaning. When one looked at their children and grandchildren, there was a sense of responsibility that could not be left to others or withdrawn from when the going got tough. It was an emotional journey but that passion helped to keep the momentum moving forward.

There were detractors but it was important not to back down. Courageous leadership accepted challenges and refused to be complacent when excluded. Words like *can't* create an opportunity to *do*. Being the first to accomplish something just opened the door for others to follow so it was important that when one could, they must step out of their comfort zone and try something new, as daunting as it may have seemed. Through prayer and ritual come courage and the willingness to continue through insurmountable odds.

Leadership builds consensus. A leader without any followers is not authentic. It was important to talk with the community and to ensure that their voice becomes yours. When a critical mass was reached and there was one voice, anything could be accomplished. The hard part was sustaining that momentum. That took hard work and tenacity. Some forgot about where the original mandate came from and would follow their own lead but that was not service. Serving the community required license to try new things in new ways. Community leadership that stifled its educational leadership and made them afraid to act did not maximize the

potential of those in their service. The longer you journeyed with the community, the more you were able to represent their interests and gain their trust. One could not make decisions on behalf of the community but with authenticity, encourage them in ways that would help to achieve their consensus.

Courageous leadership needs to take risks and innovate. There was value in doing things in a new way but more value in doing things *not* in the old way. With *Indian Control of Indian Education*, early proponents were casting off that which didn't work and building a new system with incomplete tools. That required an innovative approach and problem-solving skills. The innovations, though, were not the musings of the young but the wisdom of the old. The real innovation was promoting ancient wisdom in a modern educational environment. Necessity was the mother of invention and when Indigenous education was being starved out, great things happened.

That revolutionary work came at a personal cost. Jumping through the hoops of Western academia at a breakneck pace to be able to be qualified to serve the community took a great toll on an individual and their family. There was also internal wavering were some lost sight of the vision and chose to return to the status quo. Leading change in a divided community was taxing and it caused one to look at themselves and question whether they were going down the right path. That doubt occurred but it was important to stay the course. Changing leadership could also disrupt progress. People become weary with long stretches between victories and looked for the easy wins. This taxing work sometimes resulted in the need to change contexts and look for a refreshing new beginning.

Working in a role that always challenged the status quo also came at a cost. There was a cost to being noncompliant. The powers that be had tools at their disposal to pressure the noncompliant into compliance. That was nothing, though, compared to the isolation that occurred when those who cut their teeth on the same revolutionary ideals started to fall away. Without those like-minded people to talk to and reminisce about the beginnings of the journey, it could be lonely work. Isolation took the energy out of the battle. In the context of the supportive cohort, the weariness was not so daunting.

Still, after years of struggle, one built up a cadre of skills useful in that oppositional milieu. It was far more rewarding to build a career on revolution rather than compliance. That mandate came into clear focus when one realized the hurt that the community experienced at the hands of residential schools. The desire to rebuild trust in schools built on their own tradition so that they could benefit from all the attributes of a modern education was motivation enough to keep the struggle going. Reengineering an assimilative tool to be used for emancipatory purposes was a struggle worth fighting. The greater the efforts to dismantle the status quo the harder the status quo would resist. That was when it was important to fight the battle on our own turf and prove that ancient tools of

Indigenous knowledge could accomplish the same outcomes as a modern Western education.

Another skill crucial in that work was maintaining relationships with the community. Participating in ceremonial and social gatherings was essential for building and maintaining trust. That participation also ensured that the knowledge exchange was not only in the context of the school but recognized that that happened in many small ways through the natural cadence of the community. Time spent being a broker of community knowledge and ensuring that all families were able to contribute to the vision ensured a lasting community consensus. When those in service could hold up a visual of what the community aspired to, that was an indication of relationship. It was incumbent upon the educational leader to be able to broker community knowledge so that the community could trust the direction and pace of change.

That work also afforded one the opportunity to build the skills commensurate with the mainstream. That revolutionary work caused one to have to be extremely vigilant with policies and processes because the powerbrokers were not above using manipulation and tricks to disadvantage the community. That skepticism was necessary in a system predicated on power relationships. To resist that kind of oppression, it also helped to be stubborn!

Serving the community required one to provoke change on occasion to resist complacency. That was done with good ideas and enthusiasm. Oppression could cause complacency that was hard to break. When one had not been afforded any power in their lives it was difficult see the opportunity of revolutionary change. That was where the leader had to be hopeful and encourage that every small revolution contributed to significant change. One also needed to read the environment and know when to act boldly and went to stand down.

Success was measured in reflecting upon the many small victories that spanned one's career. One needed to be able to find the positives and give thanks to the Creator for the little things that often turned out to be bigger things down the road. Success was measured by the emotional intent that characterized the effort. If the fight was worth fighting for, then even the fight was the success. Mostly, success was measured by the people that came up to you and tell you that you made a difference.

### **Individual Depiction of Kenneth**

With every opportunity that was presented to you, there was always someone watching your development and determining whether to invite you in to ever more complex responsibilities. The invitation was to recognize and further build your capacity but it was also motivation to strive to be the best in your field. If your work was worthy of recognition, the community would provide you that endorsement. Recognition of the community was genuine and meaningful and

markedly different than recognition of achieving outcomes for the sake of recognition. There was a remarkable synergy when ambition matched opportunity. Preparing oneself to receive opportunity and being genuinely interested in the welfare of the community allowed those who were watching to see that spark of interest and know that inviting you to new challenges would pay dividends. Opportunity, though, must match character. Without the foundation of a character conducive to leadership and challenge, opportunity would not be realized.

Service was also about being in the right place at the right time. The *Indian Control of Indian Education* era fostered the development of many with ambition, as there was a need for Indigenous community members to take leadership roles in creating change in the education sector. The explosion of Indigenous people coming into the education sector was not about the existing system deciding to welcome in Indigenous participation. The system was still racist and exclusionary. Young Indigenous people were being called to participate in the system and create change and opportunity not available to earlier generations. When Indigenous people came together in a college setting, they created a community of Indigenous learners conducive to mastering the Western education system and beginning the journey of Indigenizing the system. That marked the end of complacency of Indigenous peoples within the education system. When one was caught up in the excitement of change, it was difficult to see the larger implications yet to come. It was about enjoying the journey and making a difference, unaware of the greater outcomes that lay ahead.

Opportunity and ambition opened doors. When one rise to the challenge, opportunities arose with a pace so brisk that it was sometimes daunting to consider whether one was ready to take on those challenges. Opportunities for ever-escalating challenges needed to be considered within the context of the time. It was a time of making up ground. Readiness had as much to do with being willing to take on the challenge as it did with mastering content or fitting someone else's view of readiness. Participating in those opportunities came with much more of a challenge than to those who had not experienced marginalization. The challenge was to participate, master the role and foster change. When one was aware of the context and why things were unfolding as they were, it was important to advantage oneself through further education or selective choice of opportunities to be able to maximize influence.

To maximize one's influence in the new sphere of participation, it was crucial to understand the gaps that needed to be filled. As a product of the residential schools, one was groomed not to make a decision as that autonomy was systematically stripped. In order to influence change by participating as a decision-maker, it was necessary to be able to make decisions. Compensating for the lack of experience by watching those in positions of power and developing the skills necessary to be decisive was essential in acquiring ever increasing responsibility. As an Indigenous person, acquiring skills through observation was



a familiar learning mode. It was about reaching back to foundational teachings and learning how to apply those in a contemporary context to be able to fill the gap that was created by the residential school experience.

Accepting the challenge to serve one's community was an honour that required reciprocity. Ideally, skills that were built needed to be applied in service to the community that created the opportunity. Those who chose to serve in an Indigenous community but did not have a community mandate ultimately did not have the same longevity as those who were commissioned by the community. It was important to promote those from within the community who could make a difference and resist those crucial influential positions being filled by people with no lasting allegiance to the community.

The most genuine motivation came from the children. It was easy to make decisions based on policy or process but when you reframed challenges based on the best interests of children, the decisions were qualitatively different. Decisions made in the best interests of Indigenous children would also differ from decisions that served the status quo. That was where genuine knowledge of the Indigenous community made a difference. Colonization was such an insidious tool and a demeaning experience that only those who had endured it were able to truly mount a resistance.

What one had to offer a community was vastly enhanced with grounding in language and culture. Not only people's history, but people's aspirations resided in the language. To truly believe in and work for the autonomy of Indigenous peoples, one has to believe in and work for the sustenance of Indigenous languages and culture. In spite of the onslaught against language in residential schools, some were fortunate enough to have had a consistent touchstone of language through grandparents or other family and community members. With that foundation, language was always worth fighting for. The richness of description in the Cree language provided a currency for working with the community that bound a leader through trust with the community in a way that someone without language could never achieve.

The combination of a strong foundation and passionate drive would overcome roadblocks instilled through the diminishing experience of colonization. When limitations were placed on an individual that had a weak foundation they would take those limitations to heart and fulfill expectations. When the same limitations were placed on someone with a strong foundation, they could use those impositions as a catalyst to move forward. With a strong foundation, one was able to endure negative experiences indicative of a racist society. When someone with a strong Indigenous foundation experienced those same assaults, they instigated a response that pushed that person to new heights of accomplishment. It was important to seize the opportunity to set boundaries and to dictate the rules of engagement. As much as it hurt to experience diminishing experiences, it hurt more not to resist and try to turn the situation to one's favour.

A career built on service to the community was assessed by small accomplishments over time. If the oppressive environment was such that few victories were possible, then they were grand in the scope of things. It also helped one's longevity to keep the battle where the battle belonged, on the paper or on the table. It served no purpose to build animosity towards everyone that one encountered but to direct one's energies where the greatest change could be accomplished. Patience paid off but so did being strategic about one's battles.

In serving the community, it was also important that credit for accomplishments was shared. If a leader or an advocate determined a course of action for the community, acting on that course of action would mean nothing without community participation. Providing options to communities and good guidance was a responsibility that ultimately allowed the community to own decision-making. That marked genuine accomplishments where individual victories rung hollow compared to those that were achieved within the context of the community. The more diverse a community, the more it was incumbent upon the leader to build consensus by sharing the pros and cons with each constituency within the community. It was crucial to be able to make decisions in a timely manner. There was no victory in indecision. Once the elements of a consensus emerged, the leader must bring closure to the debate.

The best way to make change was from within. That required a keen insight into the wishes of the community and a strong foundation in the sector to know the possibilities. The leader must then match the community's will with the potential of opportunity. In leading that type of work, it was always important to have a sounding board to be able to help calibrate whether you were maintaining the balance of community will and opportunity. Sometimes one just required a vote of confidence and sometimes one required that a mirror be held up so that one could see the futility of a chosen path. Peers, mentors and insightful critical friends could offer that perspective.

With the chance to look back over one's career and appreciate the opportunity that had been afforded to you, it was incumbent upon you to strive to replicate that experience for others. Whether with one's own children or others, to truly appreciate one's opportunity, encouragement had to be extended to others. The community was ultimately better for each one that accomplished something of genuine intent.

Genuine humility, *tapahteyimowin*, was an essential quality of a leader. When one realized that their competencies were as much or more owned by the community as by the individual, it put things into perspective. It helped to know where to direct one's energy. When humility taught that we were not as important as we thought we were, we stopped trying to provide all the answers and started to listen for them. There was richness in the community's will. It took many skills to draw out that rich direction but the most useful skill of all was humility.

Serving the community came with the cost of great personal sacrifice. Finding balance was most difficult when someone was immersed in service to the community. This was where families often suffered. Leaders who were engaged in that type of work needed to find balance and ensure that they were passing on their values and teachings to their children. Sustaining traditional teachings honoured those traditional teachers and ensured that their legacy lived on. Characteristic was that leaders got more reflective and refined with experience. It was incumbent upon those leaders to influence up-and-comers and help them to not make the same mistakes. Regrettably, should a family experience tragic loss, it was all too often too late to reclaim precious moments and gems of knowledge that fell through the gaps of imbalance.

Thank you's are rare but it was important to accept accolades of those who chose to offer them. As one progressed through their career, it was important to know when to be in the trenches and went to find other opportunities to impart advice and guidance. It was, in part, those people around you that would signal the need for change. Being wise was being truly valued by the community. Being valued by the community endorsed a lifetime of action and countered the diminishment of colonization. A life lived learning to make decisions was a microcosm of liberation and an important set of lessons that had to be imparted to others so as not to repeat the cycle. Looking back on service to the community and being able to see one's influence for change ensured that the seeds of self-doubt planted through the residential school experience would not be repeated and that there will be a new generation that won't know what it means to have to *still wait for the bell to ring*.

### **Trickster Text 1**

*Come here. No, you have to come a little closer. Step out on the ledge. I've got something that will interest you. What are they? They're wings! I traded them with a bird for some beautifully coloured plumage.*

*I know you can't see them. They're invisible. If you want them, they're yours. All you have to do is step out on this ledge and grab them. I know it's a long ways down but you'll have these wings, won't you? You'll be able to see much further but you can't get them from where you are. They're completely safe. Once you've got them on, not only can you see further than you ever have before, but when you're flying, you can close your eyes and you can see within yourself too. Pretty cool, eh? Step out on the ledge,*

*grab that limb, hold on by your toes and reach out as far as you can. If you can reach the wings without falling, they're yours.*

*You'll need them now if you want to go any further. There's only one catch. If you fail to use them, they will get rusty and they will stop working. A trade is a trade so you've got to keep them working because there's no returning them. So, to acquire these wings all you need is trust, a promise to use them and whatever is in your pocket. Now, do we have a trade?*

### **Reaction to the Individual Depictions**

Step out a little further. The individual depictions illustrated the journeys of the participants through their stories of influence, opportunity and experience. With each depiction, the characteristics of the participants emerged. Through their stories of strong foundations, passionate service and seized opportunity, the depictions illustrated their experiential kinship. Their encounters with Indigenous educational leadership made it evident that *those* people had *those* experiences during *that* time and within *that* context. Through these depictions, they lay claim to the phenomenon of interest. The phenomenon became tangible as the depictions framed a discernable context.

I shared experience with the participants on the conceptual level of Indigenous educational leadership. My experience was a full twenty years behind the participants so our contexts differed. Most of my professional career has been in the provincial school system so representation took on a whole different meaning. Still, assembling the individual depictions drew stories of character, passion or mission from their experiences. It was on that level that a shared interest in the phenomenon emerged. Our contexts might have been different but the passionate pursuit and mission driven work of pursuing

a career on behalf of Indigenous peoples in Saskatchewan, Canada was remarkably similar. Through the individual depictions, I experienced kinship with the participants. Mine was a kinship of representation that grew as the participants told stories of claiming place and reclaiming space.

In writing the individual depictions, I focused on the participants' claim to place by orienting to their influences and their opportunities. They staked their claims along a continuum of families and communities and employed familiar touchstones to serve the interests of their communities. Having situated themselves along a continuum, they reclaimed space as they set out to right historical wrongs, bring an Indigenous presence to Western education and achieve justice and equity. Who they were precipitated what they did. That was the most striking revelation that emerged to reinforce my thesis and, as pedestrian as that may seem, it framed a population in purpose and discerned a community in relation to the experience of Indigenous educational leadership.

**Claiming Place.** The participants expressed the responsibility that they felt to sustain the strength of community and heritage that they either directly benefited from or felt the loss of. They assumed responsibility that they believed was handed to them from their families, communities, predecessors and socio-political contexts. Of family influence on her call to educational leadership, Anna recalled, "I never thought of it. It was just something I had to do. Much of my youth and childhood, I was raised by [Name], who was strong-willed. Strong leadership qualities and my mother, of course..." (A1, 201-203). Kenneth also anchored his influences in his family in the statement that, "My summers, if I wasn't in residential school I was with my grandparents. I never asked my grandparents how to do things. I watched. I learned from watching. It was

just the way we were” (K1, 392-394). Kenneth’s desire to further his commitment to his family was also evident in his statement that, “I want to write my story for my kids so they have an understanding of where I came from” (K1, 363-364).

The participants also anchored their service within the context of their communities. For Elaine, she adopted allegiance to the First Nations community that she married into. Of that she said, “I was young enough to embrace it. I didn't have my own community, family instilled in me so I was sort of like a wide-open book or sponge because I could absorb it all and live it” (E1, 992-994). She went on to say of her community, “That's been our centre since we moved out in 1976. [Community] has been our home. My kids have been born and raised and educated on the reserve and so I live it...” (E1, 977-979). Service to Elaine’s community continued to significantly characterize her narrative. Kenneth also identified his allegiance to his community in his statement:

When I got sponsored to come to University, they told me that at the end of the sponsorship I had to go back and work in the North. Give back in the north. I said, “And I am going to hold true to that.” I said. “So I am going to go back into the north.” (K1, 127-130)

His allegiance to the people and communities of Northern Saskatchewan, Canada resonated throughout his responses.

Anna identified family and broader community influences that both hinted at the context of the time as well as influenced her character and commission. She commented, “I've admired some people, you know, like leaders, that have their negotiating skills like my dad...” (A1, 745-746). Her dad’s fight was for the recognition and fulfillment of Treaties. Anna frequently raised her foundation in the Treaties as a motivating factor. She stated, “I would say a motivator, I guess, is belief in Treaties and my dad was such a

powerful advocate for Treaties. That is all I ever heard when he was in my house, you know, about the political situations...” (A2, 205-207). Anna elaborated on that influence, saying, “Treaties was really ingrained, I guess, in my being...” (A2, 342). About the influential generation of leaders who fought for Treaties, Anna added, “They didn't give a shit what anybody thought, you know. They were driven by purpose and they knew what they wanted and they went after it” (A1, 753-755). Anna contextualized the fight of the leaders that she looked up to in her statement regarding the fight for lands promised but not set aside for First Nations people through Treaty Land Entitlement negotiations. Of those leaders, she said:

I've admired some people, you know, like leaders, that have their negotiating skills like my dad and [Name], you know. Pushing through for the TLE. That TLE agreement. That was no mean feat, that one. He went knocking on the Premier's door one night, [Name] did, in the eleventh hour to get it done. (A1, 745-748)

Through their narratives, the participants situated themselves in the context of the time. They viewed their participation and success through a lens of challenge and opportunity. Whether they felt prepared or ill prepared, they nonetheless used those portals of opportunity to advance a cause on behalf of their community. Elaine offered, “We were products of the '69 White Paper, Indian Affairs literally knocked on our doors and I mean that they tracked us down in [community] and the word was out, find people for this [teacher education] program” (E1, 46-49). Elaine's reference to the '69 White paper referred to the Canadian federal government policy paper that promoted assimilation of Indian people into mainstream society. Elaine spoke of the responsibility during that era in relating a humorous anecdote:

...I'll never forget the time when somebody must have informed FSIN that things were sliding a bit. That we not only enjoyed, tried to enjoy the city, but we also

enjoyed very much the city life, so to speak, so David Ahenakew was the Chief then and he gathered us all in this room and he stood up and he was standing in front of the podium and, you know. I think you know what he was like so he bangs that podium and says, “This is not what we worked for. You are not showing what you are supposed to be showing. We expect you to take pride in what you do and who you are and who you are representing. You’re not just representing your First Nations. You are representing me.” I think we only saw him twice in the three years. (E1, 296-305)

Their context, characterized by greater expectations and rising participation of Indigenous peoples, fostered opportunity for them. Of that opportunity, Kenneth commented on the many times in his early career that his potential and work ethic met increased opportunity. He recalled:

...I got asked by one of the head honchos in the Métis Society ... who was also at one time the Chief of the Federation. He invited me into his office and he said, “I’d like you to come to work for me.” (K1, 27-29)

Kenneth added, “What I think happened was that somebody saw something in me as far as leadership potential, so they were working on that in trying to develop that in me, so that one day, I would become a leader. I don’t know that I’m there yet” (K1, 458-460).

Kenneth’s recognition of these contextual opportunities was evident in his statement that, “I sometimes think that I was in the right place at the right time” (K1, 567). Specifically, Kenneth recalled, “So I went and made the phone call and I said, ‘yes, I just got the message. What’s happening?’ He said, ‘we’d like you to come to work as our assistant director’” (K1, 197-199). That invitation came at an early stage of Kenneth’s career when he did not anticipate that scope of responsibility. Elaine also recognized how opportunity prompted her to pursue greater qualifications to be able to assume ever-increasing responsibilities. Of that she said:

One of the comments from one of the men that came to supervise the teachers, “we don’t have many Aboriginal people going to get their B.Ed.’s and their Master’s so that they could be LEADS qualified so that they could do what I do,”



and, of course, there goes that spark of interest again so I took some classes for my third year. (E1, 93-97)

Of the era of increased First Nations participation in education, Elaine noted, “We were sent out with a purpose and it was to make it different” (E2, 34-35). The participants believed that those endeavours committed them to service. That was a commission that they felt fortunate and responsible to assume. They were the pivot between a proud past and an ideal future.

No matter the family, community or political motivation, the participants readily identified how their careers were engineered in service. Anna spoke of that motivation in her statement, “The underlying message is that you have to relate, for kids, the way I used it, is you give 110%. You give it your all” (A2, 614-615). Responding to a question regarding her motivation, Anna commented, “I guess to ... contribute where I can to make a better future for future generations. There has been lots of foundational things set by my predecessors in many different areas, so, to build on that” (A2, 388-390). That motivation was contributed to by tradition and experience. Anna said, “...seeing the dire need is what drives you to get things better for that community” (A2, 231-232). Anna added, “Responsibility. You can't leave it to other people to do. You can't. Like my dad said, ‘If you want to do something right, do it yourself,’ you know” (A1, 679-680). Anna elaborated:

I would think of the purpose. You can't lose sight of the purpose, why you're doing something. It always goes back to those little kids that you see the faces, the suicides, the ones that fell through the gaps. Those ones. The ones we've lost. (A1, 673-675)

Anna assessed that when you are working on behalf of your community, “It's a heavier load to bear and you're accountable” (A1, 656-657). Kenneth supported mission in community with his statement:

I represented my position on behalf of the Aboriginal thinking. Well, maybe Aboriginal community. But, you know, in terms of what's going on out there. What are the needs that we see for First Nations and Metis people and I think that's what I was representing. (K2, 932-935)

Similarly, Elaine noted, “Who's going to do it if I don't do it for my grandkids and even my kids, but mostly my grandkids now” (E1, 858-859)?

By responsibility and opportunity, the participants assumed their place in Indigenous education and leadership. They were able to articulate the reason behind their mission that precipitated their professional service. Those reasons were discernable by social and historical context. More than just getting a job motivated them and that motivation prefaced their experiences and actions. It was those motivations that elevated their experiences to the status of a phenomenon. I argue that anyone who has experienced that phenomenon would identify it discreetly. That might also be true for other historical contexts such as liberating schools of the 1970's. Recognizing a bounded context might also be true for liberal arts teachers or mathematics teachers, for that matter. Through their narratives, the participants revealed the role of Indigenous educators at a pivotal time for Indigenous peoples in Canada. Their identification of a time and context-bound experience prefaced the experiences and discernment that followed, as well as my response to them. The participants' rich experience humbled me and affirmed that I was speaking to the right people about the right experience at the right time. That was what I set out to illuminate and, as the participants' experiences shone under that light, my feelings of allegiance with them through shared experience grew.

**Reclaiming Space.** By assuming their place along the continuum of community advocacy and action, the participants were able to influence a collective reclaiming of space for Indigenous peoples in a colonized environment. They endeavoured to right the wrongs that had transpired over generations. Ultimately, they aspired to greater participation and a redistribution of resources that would challenge generations of marginalization and allow the capacity of their nations to flourish. Anna framed her motivation in that, "...getting into the classroom and interacting with those kids kind of made me think that these kids really needed teachers; First Nations teachers. I was the only First Nations adult person that they saw in the school environment" (A1, 34-36). Following her classroom experience, Anna's opportunity to provoke change and right injustices were exercised in new contexts. She recalled:

...it was in about March that ... the Chief of [First Nations Community] phoned me and said, "we really need you to come home, we are running into roadblocks with Indian Affairs" and his words were not nice! He said, "We need a new school. Our kids are bursting at the seams and not succeeding in the Provincial Schools..." He said, "You need to come home. We need a strong negotiator." (A1, 172-177)

Similarly, Elaine's service aimed to instigate change for First Nations students. She recalled:

It was about going home and doing things differently because the Elders used to say what's happening isn't working, so it can't be any worse if we try. But if we try that means though that you have to go with a different mind. That you have to go thinking about our children, our past, our history, who they are, take pride in who they are and that saying that the Elders say, "you don't know where you're going until you know where you've been." (E1, 32-38)

Elaine was also called to greater responsibilities as was evident in her recollection that, "...then I got a phone call from home saying, come home and be our director of education and so I did that" (E1, 88-89). The participants saw mission of service for the children and communities that they aspired to serve.

The era of Indian Control of Indian Education represented a shift as communities wrestled control of their schools from the federal government. Heightened awareness of the failure of federal and provincial governments to foster student success prompted First Nations to fight for greater autonomy. Of this era, Elaine recalled:

As soon as they would leave the grade from the reserve, it's like no man's land after that and so, as to this day, they wanted their kids to succeed in that world and so that was what was expected of us. What was expected of us was huge. It was massive, there was a lot. (E2, 70-74)

Elaine elaborated on some of the reasons that First Nations people were dissatisfied with mainstream education systems and how that precipitated Indian Control of Indian Education:

We pulled them out for a reason. They weren't doing well. They were filling the special ed rooms. They were building a new gym because of capital that the kids didn't get to use because they were in the special ed classes and it was just awful. It was the time of lining the kids up in the hall, not realizing what that would do to them, to check them for lice before they come off the bus they line them up and then put them in the rooms and let them go, so to speak. That was the last straw for [First Nations community]. (E2, 19-25)

Kenneth had opportunity to work with First Nations communities in the north during this era as they built the capacity of their systems to assume control of education. Of this work, he recalled:

I think they accepted that now it was their turn to decide how that was going to shape out and when we got together to develop band education policy, they were into it. We met from eight in the morning until six at night. And in the evening it was time to just toss around ideas and just relax but it wasn't formal meetings. It was informal. (K2, 112-116)

Elaine recalled that the community was deliberate about wanting to do things differently. She offered:

That was the expectation. We don't want you to come back home and do what, I'll say [community] did, you know, because that didn't work so whatever we are going to do we need to make sure it is going to work for our kids. (E2, 12-15)

The participants endeavoured to Indigenize the space that they occupied in the education sector. They acutely felt from the communities the need to return to Indigenous language and governance in how they conducted themselves in the education sector and in society as a whole. Anna recalled her emerging voice of advocacy and change when intervening to correct myths and stereotypes with her peers and professors while she was completing her graduate work. Of that experience, Anna commented:

...if they were giving misinformation, I was never shy to, excuse me, that's not correct. Things like that and sometimes it put you in a difficult situation or even sometimes confrontational in those situations because as soon as you point out someone that they have misinformation then they are, depends who it is, if they are an expert in their field and they're uttering non-truths then they get their back up. They feel challenged. (A2, 47-52)

Anna continued with an explanation of opportunities that she took to correct inaccuracies with her professional peers:

I felt that it was my opportunity to contribute to that broader base knowledge for the public..., if people don't know the facts then they should know the facts. Because historically, our story has not been very accurate in media, in publications. It's always from a European's perspective..., it wasn't until about the 1950s, that there was actually any First Nations people that were vocal. (A2, 58-63)

Elaine spoke of the renewed view of schools in relation to Indigenous students in her comment, "All Aboriginal students deserve to know, be taught accurate history regardless where they have been raised" (E1, 513-514). This would have certainly been a minority opinion in mainstream public schools in the 1970's. Elaine spoke of her sense of mission to help the community to teach the children their heritage. She recalled, "...according to the Elders, our kids couldn't get a base until they knew about themselves and knowing about themselves started with the history of their reserves and then history period, and then family and community" (E1, 165-168). Kenneth spoke of his advocacy to ensure that teachers who taught in the north were able to support the learning needs of

Indigenous students. He commented that when working with teachers who were struggling, that:

I developed an approach there in the education field with teachers that were from the south and just went at it this way and said, this may not be the place for you to teach. It would probably be far better if you went back to where you are more comfortable with the people that you've interacted with all your life, meaning this is a Métis or a northern Aboriginal settlement. You can't fit into this context. You'd probably make a good teacher if you go back to the white society. (K1, 382-388)

Elaine also talked about using the school under First Nations jurisdiction as a mechanism to instill knowledge and pride in culture. She commented:

It was teaching the kids who they are, and hopefully in ten years the documentation would still be around and they could see, you know, this Elder isn't here anymore and that family is missing a chunk and things like that. And then for science and social studies it's the legends. It's Elders coming in and talking to you about the moons and what they mean and what you do during them and what you don't do during them and when is the best time to tell stories and why we don't have our legends in summer and there's a time for it and why it is. Just that whole vast knowledge is missing. (E1, 182-189)

In addition to enlisting education as a mechanism for the protection and proliferation of Indigenous heritage, Kenneth spoke of the need to ensure schools recognized Indigenous contributions in his perspective on the applicability of some educational testing and Indigenous students:

Sadly you have all these excuses but the truth of the matter is that we live in two different cultures and when you take the southern culture and try to apply to the north and say you're going to perform the same way because were testing you, it doesn't translate well. (K1, 776-779)

Clearly the participants saw opportunity in their professional roles to reclaim Indigenous identity, participation and control in Indigenous education. Elaine decried that, in her opinion, Indigenous educators are not exploiting their influence to continue to advocate for Indigenous rights. She expressed, "I'm frustrated in the fact that we can't get it together as a team or as a cohesive unit to fight INAC in any way. It's not just

education. I'm scared for our Treaty rights. Postsecondary. It's awfully quiet" (E1, 1108-1110). Kenneth offered retrospective on his career built on advocacy:

When I look at that I think I wanted to see something better for my children and even my grandchildren. I saw how some were just not getting it and knowing that I'm by myself. I can't do it for everybody so you do it in different ways. You move on up and become a principal or to become superintendent. Then you can now begin to affect change by the people that you bring in and say, "We need somebody that will come in and work of our children." Which is another thing that I was able to do, I think, around the board table, instead of talking about kids and students, which kind of puts them over there, to saying, "Let's talk about our children, you know." There's a different connotation to it because would you accept a teacher who doesn't understand your culture to teach your children? (K1, 405-414)

His impassioned observation well represented the cohort in their service and sacrifice on behalf of their communities.

The individual depictions painted a picture of service and change. The contexts of time and geography were similar among the participants, as was the imperative for Indigenous participation in mainstream institutions, including education. That much we know from the facts. While the stories and the details differed, their rationale for service and desire for change was inherent in their experiences. The experience of their context provided an important aspect of the phenomenon of Indigenous educational leadership. Behaviour within their context was a deliberate act defined by the context. That may be the same for waves of humanity that act in a similar manner due to a contextual factor: civil war and a mass exodus, for example. For a minority and marginalized population that are continually forced to accept the guilt of the colonial clash, it can be empowering to name the place and time that result in like actions. These participants did just that. They knew what prompted them to act and what they intended to do once within that space. For that, they should be proud to be a part of a cohort of responsibility and action

that established a foundation to support evermore-complex analysis of the experience of Indigenous educational leadership.

The validation that I, and other Indigenous educators, could recognize in having the trailblazers of Indian Control of Indian Education offer in the struggle was endorsing and influential. As a phenomenon, the ability to recognize the imperative for change associated with Indigenous experience contributed to a critical dialogue about the role of Indigenous participation in Western education both in terms of de-coupling Indigenous education from a deficit perspective and continuing to define the characteristics of Indigenous education to stand as an influential period and theoretical context amidst contemporary Western education. The tendency to view Indigenous participation in education as the failure of Indigenous peoples or systems is still prevalent. Situating Indigenous education in a more discernable context helped to counterbalance an ill-informed and judgmental narrative about Indigenous education. The opposite was the emergence of a professional and theoretical discourse on Indigenous education informed by fact and experience. My realization of participation, in some small way, in this context was an endorsing and motivating experience. As I have come to see my role as a bridge figure between cultures, I equally saw that I could play a role in bridging from the experience of those crafted in the crucible of Indian Control of Indian Education to those helping to define the next iteration and imperative in Indigenous education. This is a role that I am happy to play and a realization that I was thankful to achieve.

### **Composite Depiction**

If this heuristic research aims to understand the essence of the experience of being an Indigenous educational leader, the composite depiction is the written representation of



what has theoretically converged. The composite depiction afforded the researcher opportunity to orbit the interactions of like experiences, the participants as well as my own, and catch glimpses of alignment. The individual depictions elevated the ordinary to inspiring portraits that told individual stories within a shared context. The composite depiction is like the art historian now describing a body of work.

My lens in compiling the composite depiction was relatedness. I had heard the participants relate their answering of the call of their communities in diverse yet familiar ways. If I was to bring some clarity to the phenomenon of interest, I needed to start to see the signs that were emerging. I worked from the individual depictions to witness the themes that emerged and compiled related themes to constitute the composite depiction. While the individual depictions were written in an assumed singular first person to avoid complexity in inviting the participants to assess the fidelity of the depictions, the composite depiction was written in the plural first person. Again, my objective was to offer the participants an accessible option for discerning, without complexity, their association with the composite depiction. The composite depiction was still anchored in the transcripts and was heartily affirmed by the participants. The resulting three broad contexts of the composite depiction are motivation, strategy and change.

## **Motivation**

We had a sense of mission entering the field of education during the Indian Control of Indian Education era. We believed that our role would help to improve education for Indigenous students and fulfill the Treaties. We knew schools did not promote Indigenous histories and values. Our role was to help shape schools to better serve Indigenous students by advocating for them and teaching Indigenous content. We had a responsibility to serve the children. We experienced racism and marginalization in our educational experiences and wanted to ensure that our children did not have to experience the same in their education.

Communities and leadership encouraged us to take up the challenge because they saw our commitment and potential. We had been presented with an opportunity to pick up where our Elders left off and further develop Indian Control of Indian Education. We felt proud to be called to serve in that manner and to be a part of that journey.

Throughout our professional training and practice we conducted ourselves with dignity and respect. We believed that our communities wanted us to conduct ourselves accordingly. We were fighting for these qualities in education and we couldn't hope to achieve what we didn't practice. While we weren't beyond a fight, we fought our battles with professionalism and integrity. Our efforts were to resist colonization and marginalization. These were lofty goals and we realized the importance of our roles so we always tried to bring honour to our work and communities.

As we became aware of how Indigenous people were marginalized in education, we also became aware of complacency in our communities. We were not only fighting for Indigenous participation in education but we were fighting to motivate our own communities to take back education. It was frustrating that some of our community members didn't feel the same urgency to take control of our education. Our consciousness was raised but it caused us to question why more Indigenous people were also not joining the fight.

Our primary challenge was to participate in mainstream education. We were breaking new ground for Indigenous participation in education. We felt a sense of accomplishment every time we were able to open a door that was previously closed. Whether bringing cultural content into the school or hiring Indigenous teachers, we were accomplishing something for our communities.

We learned that participation wasn't enough but transformation of Western education to reflect Indigenous participation was our goal. We talked about that with our peers and with other Indigenous leaders. Ultimately, self-governance was the goal and our part was to make sure that we could demonstrate that we could do a better job of educating our students. We were Indigenizing the system with our presence in education and transforming the system from within.

It felt good to be serving our communities. Through our professional practice we were promoting our community ideals. As our communities saw our commitment, they began to place more trust in us and offer us positions of ever-increasing complexity. As daunting as those assignments were, it was heartening to know that our communities valued our work and wanted us to continue to act on their behalf. We were brought up to understand that our accomplishments were the communities' accomplishments. We believed that anything that we had to offer in the education sector came from our families and our communities so we were proud to achieve even small victories on their behalf.

We felt a lot of pressure from our own communities to succeed. We sensed the urgency to make Indian controlled education successful. Our communities were watching our commitments while some were waiting for us to fail. With that pressure, we had to find a balance where we felt supported but not micromanaged so that we were able to take risks and try new things. While we generally received good support from our communities, they didn't follow us blindly and sometimes their skepticism was demoralizing.

It was a challenge to keep people focused on the ideals of Indian Control of Indian Education and keep them from slipping into complacency. We knew that we accepted the challenge to be Indigenous leaders in education but we were not aware of the extent to which we would have to maintain the momentum. It was easier for us to lead when we had followers and more difficult when those followers fell away. We would often spend time with our peers trying to rekindle the revolutionary spirit that set us on our journey.

There were many advantages that came with being some of the first Indigenous people in educational leadership. There were doors opened to us that would have never otherwise been attainable. We built successful careers on our opportunities. It was important that we looked at our roles not only as a calling but also as a profession as we needed to deeply invest in the work to be successful. Because the kinds of successes that we envisioned were not instant, we needed to see the benefits for our own participation as well.

Ultimately, our work was about making change from within. Those that couldn't justify that didn't last long in the profession. Our motivation had to be participation and change as this was what sustained us throughout our careers.

## **Strategy**

We had to maintain a strong foundation to be resilient to internal and external criticism. As we represented our communities, we were often personally criticized as either not knowing enough to contribute to mainstream education or to assume responsibility for Indigenous education. The strength of our family and community teachings and the strength of our identities carried us throughout our careers.

At the time that we entered the profession there was some recognition by the mainstream of their failure to serve Indigenous students well. Some of our currency in the mainstream was that some were genuinely looking for solutions. That tacit acceptance allowed us to participate in the mainstream to a greater extent than we might have otherwise. Once accepted into mainstream education, we used our presence to advocate for enhanced Indigenous participation.

In order to be successful representatives of our communities, we had to believe in the community and its potential. That belief caused us to emphasize community

consultation and ensure that any time we were taking something on it was in the best interests of the community. We wanted to ensure that Elders and community leaders trusted in our direction and knew that they had voice in change. Our efforts to gather community voices paid off as our leadership was rarely challenged. It was important to be immersed in our communities. We would make a point of attending community events and celebrations and make sure that we maintained a touchstone in our communities, as it was important to maintain positive relationships.

Our rapid rise in the field of education and the fact that we were participating in a context foreign to us caused us to have to carefully watch the decision-makers that we experienced and learn from them. Our goal was to be as good or better than those that we were working for. We needed to have all the skills of educational leader so that we could successfully negotiate with them in achieving our ideals. That also caused us to need to put plenty of time into preparation for any battle that arose. That may have been true for any leader but it was especially true for us as we were entering into new contexts.

At times, our work caused us to have to adopt a level of confrontation that was not typical of us but that was respected in the mainstream. It was difficult to step out of our typical persona but it was sometimes necessary. We had to consciously resist letting that characterize us. It served our interests and we were able to leave it at the boardroom table and return to our families and communities intact.

Even with all of our work to emulate the mainstream and to acquire sufficient foundational knowledge, we were still not insiders. We needed to draw on our traditional strengths of resilience and ingenuity. Our communities had endured in very difficult circumstances for generations and had not only survived but accomplished great things. We drew on those strengths in our work. The excitement of being some of the first to do things in a new or different way caused us to be inventive in our work. We had to do more with less as we were disadvantaged in resources. We were resourceful and created new opportunities for students. We were not only trying to re-create the status quo but also were trying to create something new and different with the little that we had available to us.

Our innovations were a result of a combination of traditional teachings and contemporary knowledge. That ability helped develop our problem-solving skills that became transferable to any situation that we faced. Because we, as Indigenous peoples, believed that once we shared an idea that it belonged to everyone, we were well suited to innovations. We were not proprietary in our knowledge so we capitalized on our sharing of good ideas to scaffold knowledge and develop new and better initiatives. The more complex the leadership challenge became the greater our skills developed. Opportunities for innovative change that were presented to us allowed us to build skills well beyond those of our non-Indigenous peers as we broke new ground in unfamiliar territory.

## Change

We grew weary of always having to resist compliance to the mainstream. We were always balancing trying to master the mainstream system while simultaneously trying to Indigenize the system. Eventually we were looked upon as experts in Indigenous education but if we challenged the status quo we were labeled rebels. We had to endure many personal sacrifices in our work. Sometimes the challenge got the better of us and we would move to a new community or undertake a new role to be able to achieve a fresh start. We also endured the cost of isolation as community enthusiasm waned and some of those that we began the battles with fell by the wayside. Our work was often very lonely.

There was a great burden to bear when we worked on behalf of a community as we are always accountable to the community and we didn't want to let them down. Sometimes our communities could be divided on an issue, making it especially tough as we ended up being at odds with at least some within the community. There was also the danger of investing in a certain initiative only to have community leadership change and disempower us. It was demoralizing to invest so deeply in something we believed in only to have support pulled back.

One of the most discouraging setbacks was when those that fought alongside of us for years began to fall away. When we were young, we had a rebellious energy that was strong and we had each other. As we became more experienced in the profession, those of us who began together became fewer and it became harder to sustain our energy.

We often had to put aside our own personal goals and aspirations to prioritize work on behalf of our communities. That work was so all-consuming that sometimes our families suffered by neglect or by always receiving our brokenness at the end of the long battles.

There were also many benefits to the work that we did and one was that we built skills in mainstream education as we were forced to master the status quo. We became expert educators and educational leaders. We believed that the communities that commissioned us in our work would be proud of our accomplishments. We were raised not to hoard anything, including victories. This allowed us to share our accomplishments as our skills grew. Our growth and success was the growth and success of our communities.

Success was measured in small steps over time but it was also measured by the emotion that you put into each effort. We were proud that because we faced every challenge with integrity, whether we won or lost, we still enjoyed the victory.

Although we never entered that work for self-aggrandizement, it was rewarding when the community recognized our commitments and accomplishments. There was as much satisfaction in a *thank you* as there was in any other form of professional recognition. Mostly, the communities recognized our work and contribution by imparting on us ever-increasingly complex responsibilities.

We believed that it was better to have lived a life fighting for what we believed was right than enduring a life of oppression and marginalization. We had modeled action and the exercise of our autonomy and that would help to break the cycle of colonization and marginalization and that was the greatest reward.

Our opportunity arose as the community had great need. We enjoyed opportunity not available to those in previous generations and we were grateful for that opportunity. Our readiness was relative to the needs of our communities and the skills that we brought to the profession were as a result of our strong foundations in community. To honour the opportunity that we had been presented, we choose to practice reciprocity and ensure that we were offering similar opportunities for participation and advancement to up and comers. Just as our Elders fought for us to have opportunity, we provided opportunity for others.

Ultimately, genuine victory will be achieved when future generations can act on their Indigenous identity without permission or endorsement from the status quo. It was an honour to be called to serve our communities. It was because of our communities that we had the capacity to serve. They nurtured us, taught us, fed us and created who we were. It was our turn to give back. Anything that we accomplished was on behalf of our communities.

## **Trickster Text 2**

*Thanks for the shell. I wasn't sure what was in your pocket. I made two more deals and got two more shells just like it. Here, I'll put that under this shell. Watch the shells. Are you watching? Are you still looking in the right place? Is it under the first shell? Is it under the second? Were you keeping your eye on it or did you look away? I'll tell you what. If you find it, I'll give you back your shell and the two others as well. O.K., let's go. Right, centre, left, right, right, left, right, centre. That one? Sorry! That one? Nope, not there either. Well then it must be this one? Surprise! There's nothing there! You were so busy keeping your eye on it that you missed everything else! Now I better get going. Help me get this sack on my back. What? That looks like your bow?*

*That's your lodge? You recognize all of your food? This is all merely just a coincidence. Everything in this sack belongs to me. I know, I've had my eye on it all along!*

### **Response to the Composite Depiction**

See what's not there. The composite depiction merged the experiences of the participants through familiar characteristics the way that strangers of a similar geographic and historical context meeting for the first time discover common points of reference. In telling of their experiences in Indigenous educational leadership and in allowing me to work with their narratives to build a profile, they allowed a glimpse into their reality while also having those realities reflected back at themselves. The three themes that emerged in the composite depictions were motivation, strategy and change. Those themes were constructed from the themes that I assigned to each of the narratives through my review and reflection. Those broad themes illustrated the catalysts for their service to community, how they exercised their influence and the difference that they were able to make.

In looking beyond the presentation of the themes, I kept coming back to questions that tried to peer beyond the obvious. Those questions pushed past motivation by asking not *why I do what I do* but *can I do what I do?* They pushed past change by asking *whether I made a difference?* Those questions were not to say that the respondents were characterized by doubts, but the significance of their posing questions of confidence and competence (Ralph & Walker, 2011) throughout the interviews helped to define their contexts, their participation within those contexts and, ultimately, help to see what was not there.

**Confidence.** The composite depictions told of service and commitment based on place and role within a specific community. The participants took their places among their Elders and ancestors in implementing Treaty and protecting Indigenous language and culture. The questions that merged from among the stories of influence were questions of the legitimacy of place along that continuum. That was not to say that the research participants felt illegitimately there, but that they questioned their readiness and the enormity of the task. That is something that I know well. In fact, it may have been legitimacy of place, role and mission that precipitated this study. The study, though, did not aim to legitimize experience but contribute to establishing a contemporary critical discourse in which to situate experiences of resistance and change to precipitate more of the same and, ultimately, a more cohesive discourse led by Indigenous educators that launched from strength and contemplated strategic influence of the education sector as a whole.

Anna recalled, “My very first teaching job, I was not a trained teacher. I was offered to teach Cree language...” (A1, 11-12). Nevertheless, she invested in her work and experienced success despite her limited experience. Recalling how she managed a new and unfamiliar task, Anna commented:

To the students I think I was able to get commitment, I guess, from them and they gave me what they wouldn't give other teachers. For an example, the first year I went there, the beginning of the school year when they are distributed the extracurricular activities, who is doing what. And the new kid on the block always gets kind of an initiation. I got girl's soccer, both junior and senior soccer, ... and I had never picked up a soccer ball in my life. I didn't know anything about soccer. I had never played soccer. But those kids knew, and because so many of them lived in the residence, in the close confines, they had that opportunity to play amongst each other extra hours of practice and I find our kids are natural athletes. Very talented and so we took that team to, and won provincials. (A2, 136-145)



Anna recognized her challenge and how she responded to that challenge through relationship and commitment. Similarly, when reflecting on her entry into educational leadership, Anna recalled:

...as for being a Director of Education I had no training to do that other than my experience within different school settings. Just kind of thrown into it and then some of the skill set required for that job such as budgeting, human resource stuff. I had never done things like that so it was a steep learning curve that's for sure. I learned very quickly that you have staff that have expertise and you built that team around you as a support mechanism, that you have to do that, you can't have a do-it-all or know-it-all [attitude]... (A2, 217-223)

While she recognized her lack of experience in leadership, she compensated by relying on others and sharing responsibility. Anna expressed confidence in her ability to overcome obstacles while recognizing that as an Indigenous person she did have systemic limitations imposed upon her:

I've heard on more than one occasion from different people in different fields, sports being one of them, is that, sorry but if you're an Indian you have to be twice as good. So that's what we have to be and the other thing I never really come to the table, how can you say that, you can't come to the table thinking, "I'm just an Indian, just an Indian." That's not in my vocabulary, sorry. (A1, 467-471)

On the mammoth task of negotiating for new schools with the Department of Indian Affairs that happened early in her career, Anna reflected, "I think it was unfamiliar. Especially for a woman to be coming forward like that. I never really thought of it. It's just something that had to be done" (A1, 282-283). When asked about whether she ever had doubts in terms of her readiness to tackle the challenges that she was faced with, Anna recalled:

Oh, yes, lots of times. I'm not the one for this. Who can we get as allies? We're not strong enough. We need to get another voice. Like Idle No More. Back to them. These powerful voices that are standing up behind them, you know. Same scenario. Where can you get the support from, the knowledge. Arm yourself with facts that can't be refuted. (A2, 692-696)

Similarly, Elaine reflected on not knowing what she didn't know in her comment, "...I think we were too excited not to see the wide parameters of what we were trying to do" (E2, 106-107). Anna also offered, "You don't realize you possess certain skills I guess" (A1, 292). Elaine recognized the enormity of the work that she found herself in. She commented, "They wanted their kids to succeed in that world and so that was what was expected of us. What was expected of us was huge. It was massive, there was a lot." (E2, 72-74). Elaine experienced questioning of her effectiveness illustrated in her comment that:

Sometimes you question yourself. Like am I going down the wrong road? I've got a lot of people saying things different, you know, and so here then you think about it it's like, "no, I'm not," but it takes a while to get back into that space in order to fight the fight again. Sometimes you get pretty worn down. (E1, 561-564)

Kenneth also recognized his limited experience as he was invited to embark on a leadership assignment in his comment, "So I'm going, 'Holy, man... I don't know? I've only got one year plus that little bit I had in Saskatoon,' I said, 'as far as working in the classroom'" (K1, 207-209). Kenneth spoke explicitly of an opportunity that he took to check in on his progress and effectiveness early in his leadership career. He reflected:

I guess, always in the back, in those days is, am I doing this right? Who's my sounding board? Who do I bounce this off of to get some feedback in terms of are we even going in the right direction, or am I just spinning my wheels? (K2, 189-191)

Despite pangs of doubt, the participants embarked upon their work with confidence. Of his role in establishing an alternate education program, Kenneth reflected, "I thought it was very successful" (K1, 182). Similarly, when faced with an opportunity to serve in a leadership position, Elaine reflected:

I just thought I could do it ... and I think the ad at the time peaked my interest because they did want somebody that had not necessarily come out of the [College] program but had experienced First Nations education. (E1, 79-81)

Those excerpts painted a picture of externally and internally imposed questions of readiness that the participants answered through their ultimate participation and success in their roles. The question of efficacy that the participants shared told a story of the enormity of the task and expectations. Their trajectory within the context of their careers was atypical. They had more responsibility, earlier, and in unknown territory. My career looks pedestrian compared to theirs. The result of their self-dialogue was, though, a surfacing of strengths that established a foundation for their innovation and accomplishments. Their questioning of efficacy helped to motivate them forward and establish a practice of constructively critical introspection. Assessing externally imposed doubts and calibrating strengths was useful to the endeavor of Indigenous educational leadership. As those questions were associated with the experience of Indigenous educational leadership, they become opportunity to discuss, reflect and grow, rather than instigators of self-doubt and limitations.

**Contribution.** Change intimates the effects of actions and influence. Change is measured by effect on the context or community just as it is measured by effect on the individual. Asking whether one is making a difference is an astute inquiry that helps to calibrate impact based on environment and opportunity, offering a hopeful appraisal. In appraising contribution, the participants recalled incidents of limited impact. Recalling a particularly difficult teaching assignment resulting from complex community conditions, Anna commented, "...the baggage that those kids came with was too much for me to deal with. I just felt that I wasn't contributing to their growth or anything..." (A1, 150-151).

Kenneth added, “You fight the fights you can win... It's an old adage but it kind of comes in handy every once in a while when you're talking about that and I'd like to think that I've made a difference” (K1, 441-443). Kenneth further commented on measuring impact with his comment referring to his perceptions of the contribution of an Indigenous education advisory committee:

Was it worth it? I think when you believe in something it's always worth fighting for. I think the frustration comes when people just don't see it. But I think we did our job. I think we ... made Government aware of what the issues were in Aboriginal communities. I think the people around that table did a very good job of doing that. (K1, 713-720)

Elaine added perspective to what constituted success in her comment, “...it was trying to change a pattern that's happened for a lifetime... You have to remember that we've been at it 40 years and you've been in it 140 at least” (E2, 139-141).

Despite questions of effectiveness, the participants experienced positive feedback that testified to their contributions. Elaine recalled, “It's being listened to more than I ever thought it was and I find that later, when the people you've taught, or the people you've worked with, come up and say, well, if it wasn't for you” (E2, 718-720). Her successes contributed to her confidence, evident in her statement, “So I guess I'm confident after all these years of what I'm saying” (E1, 637-638). Elaine fondly recalled contributions associated with individual student successes. She recalled, “I didn't do anything special, but ... I see those students that I taught come up and they are teachers now and it's quite rewarding” (E2, 724-726). I appreciated Elaine's reflection on the experience of the interview as it related to identifying her contributions. She commented:

Like I said, I was thinking, what is he going to get out of any of this? But actually, talking about it does bring it, not quite full circle yet. But just about. But I think that the Creator puts you where you are supposed to be... (E2, 914-917)

Kenneth reflected on his contribution in educational governance when trying to focus attention on the particular needs of northern students. He recalled:

I was able to convince board members around the table to look at it in another way. Not necessarily that mine was the best way but at least give them an option of looking at it differently so that we could come up to a good decision, I think. I'd like to think most of our decisions were good decisions. But it wasn't always my idea. I would sit at the board table and I would say, "remember one thing. When you put an idea out, it's no longer yours. It belongs to everybody so you can work with it." So it was difficult at times and it was very satisfying at other times and frustrating in some instances. (K2, 581-588)

On her contributions, Anna offered, "...reflecting back now I see a lot of things that started ... during my time. I won't say I started it because I was working with the board or committee and staff, right, that are still flourishing..." (A1, 429-432).

Kenneth reflected on the role of appreciation in identifying contributions made.

He commented:

I was at a new teacher supper last night and we were sitting there and one of the guys ... comes over to our table and ... says, "You know, people are going to miss you." And I kind of looked at that and was thinking, "Who is going to miss me?" No one ever says anything and I just go merrily along. And he says, "You've had quite an impact on the School Division." (K1, 223-229)

Kenneth reflected, "I think the victories are few and far between. But you chalk them up when you see, okay, this is what we've been fighting for ... and we finally got them" (K1, 726-728). Kenneth concluded, "...there are very few thank you's. We work in education, we have a thankless job lots of the time. But for me, I see the thank you in the success that I watch" (K1, 1013-1015).

The composite depiction presented a portrayal of motivated people acting deliberately for change. The discourse that produced those benchmarks illustrated internal and external questions of confidence and effectiveness. Examining those factors

did not defend success or pronounce failure but the examination contributed meaningful context to the experience of Indigenous educational leadership useful in making meaning of the experience.

### **Exemplary Portraits**

The exemplary portrait acts as a validating tool for the individual and composite depictions. While the individual and composite depictions were written in the first person for accessibility and honour of the participants, the exemplary portraits are written in third person as in a retelling of the adventures and exploits of Elders. These kinds of portrayals would typically not be told by an individual, but told of an individual. These are the biographic pieces that now offer the reader the chronological detail that underpins reflections on the experiences. I chose to present a conceptual depiction of their experiences in the individual portraits to support the creation of the composite depiction. The context of the exemplary portraits situates and affirms the individual and composite depictions.

#### **Exemplary Portrait of Anna**

Anna was a mom with three young children living in her husband's First Nations community when she was invited to teach Cree in the local provincial school where many students from the community attended. The presence of Cree language instruction in the school was part of an agreement for services between the First Nations band and the school division. She did not have a degree or any formal training. During that time, Anna was one of the only First Nations adults in the school. Not only the students but also the staff of the school came to rely on Anna for anything to do with First Nations issues. She described herself as being referred to as the *Indian expert*. She never felt that being called the expert was a burden as she took every opportunity to try and right history from the erroneous version that most Canadians subscribed to at the time. Anna said that the perceived expertise was twofold. For the students, they relied on Anna as a connection to their families and communities. For the staff, Anna identified the questions as being less factual and more perceptual. She said that her colleagues genuinely wanted to know about the effects of residential schools or what life was like on the reserve. Because Anna felt there was genuine intent in their questions,

she was able to commit to helping to build their knowledge and understanding. After two years in this role Anna began to realize her impact and the opportunity that she had to continue to positively contribute and decided to pursue an education degree.

Anna told a story of feeling some pressure to pick up an extracurricular activity. She was asked to coach soccer but she said that she had never even picked up a soccer ball. She related that many of the students were natural athletes and through good relationships with the students, she had their commitment to work hard on the soccer team. With a lot of hard work and learning as they went along, the team won the provincial championships. She said that the school went on to be a dynasty in soccer for years to come. She attributed their success to encouragement and believes that if someone was able to genuinely draw out the best in the students that they would shine.

Anna was also enlisted to solve problems that would crop up among the First Nations students. She says that if there was a dispute between the students that she would be called on to intervene and mediate. When she looked back on that situation and why she was called on to intervene, she likened that role to that of a parent and, therefore, a role that she was happy to play on behalf of the community. Through that experience, Anna forged relationships with the students that lasted until today. She said with pride that many of her former students continued to call her on special occasions such as Christmas.

Anna attended a community based education program for First Nations teachers and earned her bachelor's degree in education. She did her internship in a grade three classroom in the local Indian residential school. Upon completion of her degree, the local school division hired Anna where she taught in elementary and high school. After a few years, she began teaching in a First Nations community in Alberta. That community was, at the time, in such turmoil that there were many social issues present in the school. Anna found that assignment very challenging as teaching often took a backseat to dealing with social issues. She stayed less than a year in that assignment as she felt that she wasn't contributing to the students' growth. Anna described the culture of the community as very different than what she was used to. One incident that stood out in her mind was when she attended a community ceremonial dance. After experiencing the ceremony she went home and the next morning one of her students asked if she was at the dance the prior evening. Anna answered that she was and the girl asked if she had seen her kokum (grandmother) die. Anna recalled that the girl asked in such a matter-of-fact way because she was so used to death that it shocked her. Further to that story, Anna referenced a second community of the same band that had maintained traditions and had a much more positive social environment within their community. She described those people as traditional and respectful and as having a strong work ethic. It was that consistency that Anna was familiar with from her experience. The social upheaval in that

community at the time was unsettling for Anna and she chose not to remain in the community.

Anna's mom was also an educated woman. Anna moved with her mom to an assignment where she took the opportunity to engage in graduate studies. While on campus, Anna also became a sessional lecturer in Native Studies in northern fly-in communities. While Anna was studying and teaching, she received a call from the Chief of the First Nation where she had raised her children. She recalled the Chief saying, "We really need you to come home, we are running into roadblocks with Indian Affairs." The issue was that the community was advocating for a new school as the existing facility could not accommodate all of the children. The community desired to have their children in their own school because they were not succeeding in the neighbouring provincial school. The Chief invited her home, referencing her strong negotiation skills. Anna took up the challenge and became the director of education. Anna assessed that that was during the era of Treaty Land Entitlement negotiations so the band had access to funds, which may have been causing Indian Affairs to drag their feet on funding a school. So, together with the Chief and Council, Anna went to Ottawa and managed to "twist some arms and kick some shins and negotiated a \$14 million school."

Looking back on that accomplishment, Anna took no credit and brushed it off as something that just needed to be done. She did, however, reference skills acquired from her adopted dad who was a strong-willed and vocal leader. Anna's mom was also a woman of leadership and influence and Anna referenced her influence as well. She said that she never purported to have all the skills that would typically come with the role of director of education, such as policy and planning or budgeting, but that she was willing to learn and work hard to lessen the steep learning curve. She also relied on the expertise of her staff and was not threatened that they were able to do their jobs and may have known more about their particular areas than Anna. Anna had a leadership responsibility and accepted and exercised that responsibility.

It was impressive that Anna stated that the community was not sure how to approach negotiations for a new school so she came home and developed an extensive proposal complete with background, evidence and forecasts. Nothing in her experience that far would have indicated that she would have had that experience except that she grew up in an environment where fighting those kinds of political battles would have been the norm. By that time, Anna was divorced and so had only committed to return to her adopted community until such time as the school was achieved. That accomplishment took three years to complete.

When Anna thought back to that experience, she recognized that it was unfamiliar to have an Indigenous person, especially a woman, in that role although she felt it was something that just had to be done. Of her skills, she said that at the time she did not recognize what she possessed that would contribute to her success in that



role. She says that she didn't realize that there were protocols so she just “marched right through.”

Following that experience, Anna began work as a director of education for a tribal council and continued along the theme of building schools by accomplishing seven buildings during her tenure. The reality was that the communities either had terrible schools or no schools at all. While the existing facilities were inadequate, some families also chose to send their children to neighbouring provincial schools where the children did not succeed. While the needs existed, building seven schools in seven communities was an impressive feat in any era.

On strategy, Anna said that it was crucial to have hard data on the current picture and forecasts and projections for the future. Along with the numbers, Anna assembled proposals that looked at social and economic factors and the development that a new school would help precipitate. She also made the case that the new school would attract more students back to their home communities. An entertaining anecdote was Anna having an argument with a bureaucrat from Indian Affairs who was using 2.5 children per family as the Canadian norm in enrolment forecasting. Anna accurately made the case that that was not the norm in First Nations communities. Anna was quick to challenge data and perceptions when they were inconsistent with the First Nations reality.

In each instance of building a new school, Anna identified a Chief or other ally that she was able to collaborate with. It was important to her to work as part of a team and to work with someone that shared her passion for the communities and had a willingness to work hard to achieve the goal. Anna prides herself in being able to read people and know whom her allies are. Of that she called it an innate ability that some people have and others not. In her work, she was able to use that ability to know who to collaborate with as allies and how to work with those that she faced as adversaries across boardroom tables. That judicious sense of where Anna chose to invest caused her to marvel at some without the ability to read people and situations and get themselves into unenviable situations. Anna had learned that once you say something you cannot call it back so she advised that humans have two ears and one mouth for a reason. Anna was a careful listener and identified that she very much valued that trait in her work.

Anna's achievements went beyond building schools. As director of education, she was instrumental in fostering some of the first partnerships between tribal councils and provincial school divisions in the province of Saskatchewan. Anna also served on provincial and national level committees as a representative for Saskatchewan First Nations. In all of her accomplishments, Anna referenced boards or committees and staff that were instrumental in helping to foster accomplishments. She believes that people need to be given the opportunity to try new things and sometimes make mistakes along the way, as this is how we learn. Anna specifically referenced some of her program coordinators who worked for her when she was the director of education. She described that people were

coming in pretty green because there was little budget to hire more experienced staff. She said that the staff all learned on the job but that they became experts in their field in time. One of the programs developed during that time has spawned many spinoffs with great success. Anna didn't point out the obvious that she was the common denominator in all of those successful initiatives that she referenced.

Anna indicated that it was important in any negotiation to be armed with the facts and fully informed about the situation. She said that it was crucial to know as much as you could about your opposition and to always consider that those on the other side of the table were opposition, whether they admitted it or not. She said that she learned from her dad to look people in the eye and never fear them in negotiations. Prior to entering meetings, she would try to find out as much as she could about those who would be at the table and do any prior work of lobbying behind the scenes. She said that she would prepare for high-level meetings with whatever strategies were available. Anna related that when armed with the facts, you sometimes have to call people on misinformation and that that made people angry. She was able to anticipate that potential response and take it in stride as just the way business was done.

Anna said that as a First Nations person, people expected you to be twice as good as anyone else. She accepted that challenge and believed that she could accomplish anything just as good or better than anyone else in the field and that she would never excuse failure as a result of being *just an Indian*. Further, Anna invoked a phrase from her adopted father that, "if you want something done right you should do it yourself." It was important to remember that her dad was a First Nations activist in a time when adopting that role would have been very much against the status quo and would have required an attitude of fierce independence.

Ultimately, Anna was driven by need in the communities. She said that at times it was demoralizing when the going was tough but that she would, "get real pissed off lots of times but you go back and you regroup and you come back again." Of her work she identified that it was a heavy load to bear when it was on behalf of the communities. She would see the faces of the children who had fallen through the cracks and that was enough to motivate her to keep going. Anna also identified great influence from discourse in her home around Treaties. She grew up in a very politicized environment and, while not aspiring to become a politician, she learned the value and importance of protecting Treaties and that that was an active rather than a passive role. Her work in the education sector was in the very field that was testing the relevance and potential in Treaties.

Anna recounted a situation where Indian Affairs was insistent that they did not need to build a school in a First Nations community because the students primarily attended school in the neighbouring provincial school. Anna did some digging and found out that Indian Affairs was actually funding the provincial school to expand to be able to serve the First Nations students. Having found out about that, she was armed with evidence to be able to call out the inequities in

process and achieve a school for the community. She recalled that the bureaucrats from Indian Affairs were quick to plead ignorance and blame the arrangement on their predecessors. Another indicative anecdote was that Anna was negotiating with Indian Affairs around busing policy. They were insisting that students were not eligible for transportation funding if they lived within one mile of the school. Anna's argument was that the community, with its exposed rural roads, could not adhere to a policy that was meant for an urban center as it put the students at great risk. The Chief invited the bureaucrats out to his community where he drove them a mile out from the school on an icy road in windy 40 below weather conditions and invited them to walk back to the school.

Ultimately, Anna referenced the hard work, diligence and dedication of people from her dad's era who were forerunners in the Treaty Land Entitlement movement. She admired the brash and driven way that those individuals pursued their objectives with vigour. She admired their gifted oratory and their intellect that would rival any academic or professional in the field. She longed for leadership with the fortitude and passion of those that she modeled her own leadership after. Most interestingly, though, was that Anna described an era that would have been dominated by male leadership and Anna was able to use that same template of leadership to advance her own leadership style. Still, Anna recalled the words of her father in his latter years were he identified that it was the women and the youth that would have to step forward and take on the challenge that he and some of his peers had begun on behalf of Indigenous peoples and communities.

Anna added that young people today don't have the same drive and passion as that of her mentors. It is important to remember that many of the mentors that Anna described had a military background as well. In a revealing moment, Anna asked me during the fading moments of an interview if I knew her children. I ask her to tell me about them and she described them as wonderful kids who are all super high achievers. She described their professional standing, their outstanding achievements, their strong work ethics and their family commitments. It was obvious that Anna had translated the strength and tenacity that she had witnessed and lived to her prodigy with great success. Anna said that they all have talents and that we guide our children.

As Anna looked back at her career, there was only one job that she regretted where her expertise and initiative were not valued. She described the job as more of an office job where she was micromanaged and did not experience any fulfillment. Ultimately, she chose not to stay in that environment and it wasn't long until she was in another situation that capitalized on her skills and was more rewarding.

Anna identified the importance of constant communication and relationship building in leadership. She identified a situation where a provincial school community and a First Nation were at odds over a tuition agreement. Anna was

co-chairing the mediation and was not only able to get the two sides talking but laid the foundation for a partnership that continues today. What she did was focus on the facts and educate both sides about the reality that the other side was dealing with. In solving the immediate challenge, it was not lost on Anna that the provincial system looked upon First Nations students as a source of tuition more so than try to maintain their enrollment throughout the course of the school year. Her mission was to change that attitude over time. Anna described that strategy as *keeping your enemies close*. She would rather invest the time into changing attitudes while remaining in relationship with her adversaries than alienate them and lose their cooperation as well as the opportunity to change their minds. Again, those were skills that Anna gleaned from the tutelage of her dad.

Reflecting on the skills that were needed to continue to move the marker ahead for Indigenous peoples in Canada, Anna referenced firstly the need for passion. Without a belief in the cause, nothing else of substance would follow. With a deep and abiding belief in the objective, Anna said that with determination, preparation and good allies that the *knowledge is power* attitude would help to achieve the objective.

Responding to my endorsement of her skills and accomplishments, her parting remark was one of humility that she *just did what she had to do*.

### **Exemplary Portrait of Elaine**

Elaine left a small rural community at the age of 17 when she married into a First Nations community and embraced the community and culture with vigour. It was in that community that she raised her children and it is that community that she calls home. Elaine related that she didn't have a strong community or family identity ingrained in her as a youth so that she soaked up her new community culture like a sponge.

Elaine and her husband answered an initial call for Indigenous teachers in the mid-70s. They were products of the 1969 White Paper and had gained the confidence of the community that she could support their efforts in Indian Control of Indian Education. She believed that her responsibility was to learn the system and come back and do things differently to foster success for First Nations students. Elaine truly believed that the community's vision was strong and that the objective was to develop students who knew and believed in their Indigenous identity and the potential of their community. She referenced an Elder's teaching that you don't know where you are going unless you know where you are. Elaine took that on as a personal motivation to help students understand their community, history and sense of place.

Elaine recounted the experience of being among a minority group of students on campus and the feeling that others genuinely questioned their presence in the university setting. That skepticism caused the cohort of Indigenous students to

stick together and to support each other. Elaine told of the cohort becoming quite comfortable together and with city life and, as students would be apt to do, tipping the balance towards their social lives. She recalled that the then Chief of the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations visited their cohort and dressed them down for their behaviour. She said that the group of students accepted that scolding as the Chief reminded them of their responsibility to their communities. She said that throughout her tenure as an undergraduate student, that only had to happen a couple of times as the group got the message and conducted themselves accordingly.

Elaine accepted early the commission of the community when, upon returning from her professional studies, the Chief talked to her and her husband and said that it was up to them to build a system for the students that were repatriating from provincial schools. One of the early initiatives that they took on was the development of a local education act for their community. Elaine identified the need to have an act that would set the intent of First Nations education as being unique and apart from provincial schools that were failing First Nations students, rather than trying to replicate an inadequate system. She was also instrumental in developing a local history project as a foundational document in band controlled education. The goal was to teach the students their history and use it as a foundational resource in all curricular areas. They understood that curriculum outcomes could be achieved through different means that were more culturally and community relevant. Elaine endeavoured to actualize that mandate through her work as a teacher, principal, superintendent and director of education with First Nations and tribal councils.

Elaine dedicated much of her work to involving the community. She would instigate community gatherings where traditional food was shared and the community would come together to exchange knowledge. Elaine saw and acted on the potential of those gatherings to influence curriculum and those opportunities also helped Elaine to become very knowledgeable about the community and strengthen her advocacy on their behalf. She recalled fondly how home visits were characterized by her being invited in without any reluctance and lots of laughs and good relationships over tea and bannock. Through those meetings, the notion of change in education to enhance outcomes for First Nations students was strengthened by interaction with parents and Elders in the community. As Elaine's husband was a community member, he also opened doors and created opportunity for Elaine to feel genuinely integrated into the community where she lived for many years.

While Elaine was teaching away from her home community, she got a call from the community asking her to come home and serve as the director of education. That was during the early years of Indian Control of Indian Education when the responsibility had been devolved without a lot of capacity building. Indian Affairs was still micromanaging First Nation's education so the First Nations community was looking for one of their own who would meet the qualifications

to supervise teachers. That challenge was enough to spark Elaine 's interest and initiative and she began graduate work to be to be recognized alongside provincial directors of education. Elaine completed her Master's degree in two years and still reflects that it took a great toll on her at that time. With her Master's degree, she became a superintendent of a tribal council for about four years prior to the three years as director of education in her current role.

It was early in Elaine 's career that she felt the impact of the revolutionary work that she had undertaken. She said that in the early days of Indian Control of Indian Education, the Department of Indian Affairs began writing into funding agreements that bands were required to follow provincial curriculum. She saw that as early restriction on band controlled education and an early indication of where the power resided. Elaine recalled that the undying objective from the communities was to ensure that their children could compete in mainstream education while learning what was relevant to them. Even that desire for student success was viewed as a threat. The cost of pursuing independence in First Nations education percolated in many different ways. Elaine recalled that the Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre collaborated with many communities on curriculum resources early in the pursuit of Indian Control of Indian Education, only to have their federal funding curtailed and their ability to serve in that capacity reduced accordingly.

Even today, Elaine feels that there is quick retribution to opposing direction from Indian Affairs. She said that it was subtle but tangible and that calls or email would not be returned or that there would be a lack of follow-through on commitments. She believed that they utilized the strategies to resist opposition. Even in the routine business with Indian Affairs, Elaine said that you always have to be vigilant and read everything multiple times to make sure that you don't miss the nuances that can trap you in missed deadlines or unfulfilled requirements that will give them permission to withhold resources. She decried that the system did not even allow trust to be built with people that she has worked with for well over 30 years.

With her personal investment in the community, Elaine identified the encouragement that came from support through things like community leadership endorsing their efforts and demonstrating support by ensuring that their children attended newly formed band-controlled schools. The opposite was the feeling of abandonment when community leadership ignored their efforts altogether or demonstrated their lack of support by sending their children to provincial schools. Sometimes it was a change in community leadership that interrupted progress and Elaine decried the two-year window within Indian Act governance that often impeded community progress.

Elaine said that the two steps forward, one step back type of support had an impact on those fighting for Indian Control of Indian Education that was sometimes manifest in changing roles to gravitate to a more supportive

environment. Elaine would attribute a feeling of support or lack of support to the level of buy in by the community. Community support was very important to Elaine as she felt that her voice in her role needed to be the voice of the community. If the community were ambiguous or ambivalent, Elaine would not feel comfortable to usurp their role and let her voice dominate.

As Elaine advanced in her career, she felt the loss of the passion of those that she journeyed with in the early days. She genuinely believed in the potential of emphasizing community history and identity but believed that proponents of an Indigenous foundation in education are now few. She identified that her commitment to that ideal had, at times, even invited ridicule from some of her contemporaries. She did, however, take some satisfaction that the provincial ministry was beginning to see the necessity of supporting identity and belonging for Indigenous students. Elaine was also demoralized when she saw that many of the directors of education in First Nations education were retired non-Indigenous administrators from provincial school divisions. She saw that as an erosion of the base of support for the vision of First Nations control of First Nations education and that it created a lack of opportunity for young Indigenous people coming into the profession. She described herself as sometimes *heart hurt and bone weary* but believed that as those of her generation moved on, there were few that would share the passion to be able to continue to move things forward.

Elaine is extremely passionate about her beliefs in First Nations education and she identified that when she was fighting with that passion in a public forum that she sometimes sounded like she's going to cry and felt vulnerable but that it was the passion that would bring out the tears. She said that sometimes she was very blunt in her assessment of what needed to be done. Elaine also felt the pang of self-doubt when she felt that she was fighting in isolation and questioned whether she was going down the right path. She said that typically she would regroup and recommit to what she aspired to as it was worth the fight. Elaine felt that as long as she was able to maintain that passion, in her current role or another, that she would keep going. Elaine took time to regroup, engage in ceremony and reflect on the objective that she had assumed on behalf of the community in keeping her focus strong and her confidence up. Elaine misses the ability to return to the land and her home community to refresh and re-energize. She believes in the support of a higher power in guiding her work.

Elaine continues to feel the urgency to make strides in First Nations education. In fact, that urgency has intensified for her as her grandchildren are in the education system. Elaine connects with the few remaining colleagues that she began the journey with to gather strength and support. She was saddened by the loss of a good friend that she was able to share her hopes and frustrations with. She lamented that that type of colleague was rare. In the loss of the generation of influential First Nations educational leadership, Elaine saw a gap in those at the top that have a tieback to that era of malcontent. She believed that there was

more consistency among First Nations educational leadership when there was a closer connection to revolutionary times.

Elaine decried the relationship with Indian Affairs that forced communities to continually jump through hoops that were continually redefined. She said that the real successes didn't matter and that it was only the latest criteria from the Department that will determine whether you achieve a grant or not. That frustrated Elaine as she felt that the lack of cohesiveness among Indigenous educational leadership did not present an as credible resistance to Indian Affairs as it did in the early days of Indian Control of Indian Education. She reminded me that Treaty rights are at stake and that all indicators are that the current federal government is not motivated by Treaty deliberations and, in fact, would prefer to weaken First Nations autonomy rather than strengthen it.

The greatest impact that Elaine experienced was with the lack of passion of communities and educators. Elaine remembered fondly when halls would be filled for band meetings about Indian Control of Indian Education and that there was a passion among educators to develop something new and different. She felt that those realities are no longer present. For her, the connection between one's Indigenous identity and their profession has been lost. In that vacuum, Elaine believes that the Department of Indian Affairs is taking great liberties to offer unilateral perspectives on what will work without genuine consultation or deference to Indian Control of Indian Education. Among young Indigenous educational leaders, Elaine sees the talent and the vision but genuinely believes that the passion that drove her early career is no longer present. In part, Elaine believes that it is the constant battering, abuse and accompanying feelings of hopelessness that makes it hard to stand up as a revolutionary leader. She believes that the lessons that the Elders imparted on her in her formative years are what need to be reconstituted today and that youth need to believe in their identity and the need to resist assimilation to the status quo. Elaine believes that there is potential in contemporary movements, such as Idle No More, to spark the necessary malcontent.

Elaine looks for the positives and gives thanks to the Creator for the good things. She said that it has taken some time to get to that point and to leave the frustration behind. She believes that with passion and time, things can continue to take a turn for the better.

### **Exemplary Portrait of Kenneth**

By the time Kenneth entered the field of education in his late twenties he had acquired a variety of life and work experiences. When Kenneth completed high school, a community leader stated that he recognized Kenneth's potential and invited him to work for an Indigenous youth addictions program. That opportunity served as a catalyst for Kenneth to engage in further work for the provincial government. He worked in economic development for about three



years and was subsequently invited to serve as an employment program coordinator. At one point during that work, an assistant deputy minister invited him into his office to tell him that he had been watching him and was impressed with his performance. That individual identified that Kenneth did not have a university degree and so he offered him financial support to attend university. That led Kenneth to the College of Education where he earned a bachelor's degree.

Kenneth recalled the environment that he entered when he began his teacher training. He referred to it as an explosion that was just starting to see a wave of Indigenous people attend university. In the Indian Teacher Education Program that Kenneth attended, he experienced a sense of family. That was in stark contrast to Kenneth's later high school years where he attended a residential college and was a minority Indigenous student. He attributed his thriving in that environment to his extroverted demeanour and said that he had to develop a cavalier attitude to be able to survive in that setting. Kenneth recounted of a story that a Benedictine monk related to him years later about Kenneth's first night in the dormitory. The story goes that Kenneth stood on his bed and got the attention of the other fifty boys in the dorm. He then said, "listen up guys, I'm an Indian and don't you forget it!" Kenneth said that that characterized how he lived his life, that if something needs to be said he would say it. With that comment, Kenneth added that he was not really bothered by what others say but that, "I mean, it does hurt."

By the time Kenneth completed his education degree he was married and while waiting for his wife to complete her education degree he accepted a contract teaching Indigenous youth in an urban school. Shortly into that role the principal approached Kenneth and asked him to take on a new role assessing students. As was typical in his work, he took on this role with vigour and impressed his supervisors. They urged him to stay on but he felt a strong calling to return to the north to give back as it was the north that he felt provided him opportunity to complete post secondary education. Kenneth was surprised to learn that they had no position for him in the north and no expectation of a return of service for the education that he received. Kenneth and his wife applied to work in northern communities and were offered positions in a First Nations school, which satisfied his desire to live and work in the north. Before Kenneth could even start the grade eight position for which he had been hired, he was asked to serve as the principal of an alternate education program. He implemented an experiential learning approach and worked with the students through traditional pursuits such as hunting and trapping.

Upon completion of the school term, Kenneth went to spend time at his cabin on the land. Shortly into the summer a friend came across the lake to tell Kenneth that the director of education wanted to speak with him. He was concerned as he felt that his job might be eliminated. In reality, the director invited Kenneth to work as the assistant director with the band schools. That was a role that Kenneth

stayed in for four years. During that time, one of his primary responsibilities was working with school committees to ensure local voice and participation. Kenneth found that work very trying. After four years he went to the director and indicated that he was looking for a change and would likely move on. The director urged him to stay and offered him a principalship in one of the schools that he had been working with, as there was a resignation pending. He stayed in that role as principal for two years during which time he supported the building of a community high school. Following that assignment, he decided to move on, as he wanted to acquire a master's degree in education and seek other opportunities.

Kenneth and his wife applied to teach in the Yukon as he had connections in the region. During that summer, Kenneth was invited to work in a summer program in British Columbia. The Yukon job didn't work out so he ended up back in northern Saskatchewan where he took on the role of office manager and researcher for three years. He also worked in the field delivering Treaty Land Entitlement seminars to high schools throughout the province as well as conducting archival research.

Against the backdrop of ambition, skill and recognized capacity, Kenneth had other factors that were motivating his participation in education. He reflected that he spent a lot of time in residential schools where decisions were typically made for him. This prompted Kenneth to emulate those in leadership positions that he had encountered through his work so that he, too, was able to be decisive. Kenneth saw decisiveness as a key quality of effectiveness in educational leadership so he deliberately set out to develop capacity in that area. Kenneth associated his decision to watch and learn what he felt he needed to acquire with the way that he had learned through observation during his formative years. Even when he was in residential school he would spend summers at home where he watched and learned many skills in traditional pursuits from his grandparents. Kenneth attributed that mode of learning to the way of Indigenous peoples. Kenneth's work history, reputation and community leadership attest to his decision-making capabilities.

Kenneth's desire for a better educational experience for his children and grandchildren than he had experienced motivated his participation in the profession. His sense of mission propelled him to become a principal and superintendent as he felt that would allow him to accomplish change. From that vantage point, Kenneth adopted a mission to foster the participation of Indigenous people in education. That was something that he committed to early in his leadership tenure and was consistent with throughout his career. When addressing policy and organizational issues, Kenneth would frequently return the focus to Indigenous children to emphasize their unique linguistic and cultural needs. That staunch desire to change the face of education by demanding the participation of Indigenous professionals and leaders served Kenneth well as an educator, administrator and school board member.

Kenneth successfully modeled his career on leadership to establish himself in educational leadership and promote change from within. Of the recognition that others afforded him, Kenneth conceded that he did have leadership potential and that he was fortunate that his potential was recognized and developed. Despite Kenneth modeling his career on others, he refused to be what those who called him to leadership wanted him to be. He may have become the leader that they aspired to for him but he was and is a leader focused on achieving participation and advancement for Indigenous students. Kenneth had great humility for leadership and, even as an accomplished leader, he reflected that he may someday acquire the skills to be called a leader.

Kenneth dismissed some of his accomplishments by saying that he was in the right place at the right time and that his advancement wasn't necessarily a conscious decision that he made. Still, Kenneth ended up not only having a robust professional career as an educational leader but he had extensive service on Indigenous educational advisory committees in the province of Saskatchewan. Of that service, Kenneth recounted a story where he was serving as a representative of his professional organization. He was skeptical that the organization even had a position on Indigenous education so he pressed them to answer the question as to whether he was an organizational representative or an Indigenous person who happened to belong to that particular organization. Needless to say, they weren't able to provide him a satisfactory answer and Kenneth continued to serve, motivated by his own personal and cultural ideals.

Kenneth recalled with satisfaction when he had become a Ministry superintendent for First Nations and Métis Education in the north. That was a position that he had advocated for over a very long time. Although he counted that as a victory, he declared victories few and far between. From the vantage point near the end of his professional career, Kenneth recognized that change in the education sector takes a long time. He qualified, however, that that was more prevalent in Indigenous education. Kenneth related that he has seen rapid changes in the education sector as it related to math, language arts or science, for example, but that resistance resulted in slow and incremental change in Indigenous education. In Kenneth's later years in the field of education, he decried the learning outcomes gaps for northern students. Kenneth heard plenty of excuses and although he understood that circumstances were different for northern students, he recognized complacency for northern student outcomes. Kenneth aspired to both change the mindset that northern students would always be underperforming and to improve northern student outcomes.

Kenneth stated that character had a lot to do with achievement. Being told how to do things, he claimed, didn't develop character. Kenneth recognized that people saw character in him and that the combination of his character and the opportunities that he was provided helped him to achieve his leadership potential. Kenneth poignantly recalled a moment where a guidance counselor told him to forget about university because he would never have the potential to achieve that

level of education. Kenneth claimed that that experience prompted him to encourage all children, including his own, to be happy and to follow their dreams. Further, he advised that if one encountered something that was not working, it was incumbent upon them to go back, regroup and try again.

Kenneth said that there were very few “thank you’s” in his work. He said that when someone did take the time to say thank you that it was meaningful and it would be nice to experience that feeling more often. Part of that realization came to him at a retirement event where a community member thanked him for his service. Kenneth dedicated himself to community service and always incorporated community consultations into his work to demonstrate his commitment to the community. He recounted that there was an Elder in one of the communities that he would frequently call up and ask how he thought things were going. He would explain to that Elder his intent and the strategies and ask for his advice.

Kenneth said that it was hard to see what the big deal was in relation to Indian Control of Indian Education at the time. He felt that he was just doing what he needed to do to improve opportunities for Indigenous students in schools. He knew that a big part of that was the presence of Indigenous teachers in schools and so that was the calling that he understood. Once things started to happen, he was able to see that it was possible to make a difference in the field of education through Indigenous participation. Kenneth recognized his language as a gift that served him well throughout his career. Whether in his work prior to education or in the field of education, he felt that his ability to speak Cree offered him an advantage in representing the communities that he worked for.

Kenneth summarized his contributions as making a change on behalf of the community from within. Of his leadership style, Kenneth said that it was humility, *tapahteyimowin*, which has guided him throughout his career. He has never led to be a leader but has led to serve the community that he loved. Kenneth concluded that being old doesn’t make one an Elder but that it is wisdom and understanding that prompts that designation. Kenneth doubts that he is there or will ever get there as he says there are others far more qualified to be called Elders. He will continue to defer to those with more experience and to act in a manner that will allow others to follow him so that they, too, can have opportunities to serve their communities with skill and integrity. Despite Kenneth’s admittance that there are still days when he feels that he has to wait for permission, he has many great achievements in leadership and education and has earned the right to be an Elder.

### Trickster Text 3

*Gee, you’re in a bit of a predicament. You shot that moose at the bottom of that ravine and now you’ve got to get all that meat all the way up to the top! I’m not sure*

*how you're going to do that? Maybe I can help? Oh, no, I can't carry anything! It's my back. Old injury. I do have these three things in my pack that might help, though. I could probably spare a couple of them. How about this? What is it? It's a brain. I acquired it through trade. No, it can't carry anything. Are you sure? O.K., I'll put it back. What about this? It's strength. I also acquired it through a trade. You'll take it? O.K., here it is. Enjoy.*

*(time passes)*

*You're back soon. What happened to the strength? It gave out half way up? That's too bad. It was pretty impressive. Do you want to try the brain? What else have I got? I've just got this beauty. No, I'm not sure how you'll use it? Yes, that might work! Put it on! You were right! Look at all of those that have come to help you! There you go! You will all make short work of this! Good luck!*

*(time passes)*

*Back so soon? What, you got ugly and they left you? That's tragic! I would have certainly stayed with you. What? You want to try the brain? Sorry, brother, but I said you could only have two. I need it to figure out how to get out of here with all this meat. See you later!*

### **Response to the Exemplary Portraits**

Choose wisely. That is good advice for Indigenous educational leaders. Just as the individual and composite depictions yielded accounts of experience with the phenomenon of Indigenous educational leadership, they yielded questions that help to learn from the depths of experience. The exemplary portraits added detail useful in referencing to the individual and composite depictions to help validate the narratives.

With context and role established, the exemplary portraits provided opportunity to assess what the participants had at their disposal and what they chose to do with it. The participants spoke of many strategies that they had to acquire and implement to achieve their personal and community objectives.

The thesis of unique tools innovated on the margins is germane to the experience of Indigenous educational leadership. Innovation is characterized by context. The invention of the wheel is not the benchmark. Innovation is relative to its effect. The participants affected Indigenous educational leadership through their presence, participation and effect. Individually, there were many innovations. Together, their actions over the course of near forty years constitute an unprecedented innovation. The innovation, though, is better viewed through individual acts that can then be reconstituted to view the phenomenon. The strategies that were gleaned from the participants' narratives were roughly categorized as borrowed, familiar and innovated.

**Borrowed Strategies.** The term borrowed strategies is misrepresentative as what is available to any educational leader is available to Indigenous educational leaders. Equally, those leaders have contributed to the development and refinement of leadership strategies just as have others. The notion of borrowed strategies rises as the participants frame *mainstream* strategies that they struggled to acquire and refine. Those strategies helped them to transform mainstream education as well as to gain ground in Indigenous education. Mastering strategies of mainstream education and leadership afforded them opportunities for advancement and growth.

Much of Anna's service was associated with achieving new schools for the First Nations that she worked with. Those were, according to Anna, very complex endeavours

requiring many technical and political skills. Of that experience with the community, Anna commented, “They really didn't know how to approach it, I guess, so I came home and I created a proposal with backup evidence and forecasts and stuff like that” (A1, 266-267). She offered a particularly amusing anecdote associated with her experience challenging statistics:

Initially you have to have the hard data on what is the current picture and the forecast. Not only forecast on what is but what could be, like the economic development. How would they forecast community growth? And with community growth comes more kids in the school. And then, I remember one time. I can't remember which school it was but I was arguing with INAC. The Canadian population has 2.5 children per family. Not in First Nations. So then we did a rollup of how many people and families on reserve at that time and it was vastly different than 2.5 per household. (A1, 335-342)

Anna's skills were commensurate with her role but required use and mastery to achieve her objectives on behalf of the community. Anna added that it was crucial to “be fully informed and know your opposition, whether they admit you are opposition or not. And don't ever be afraid. I learned that from my dad. Look them in the eye” (A1, 447-449)! I appreciated that intervention from Anna as it appeared far from her gentle character. She identified, though, that these skills were adopted for the purpose in which they were required. Her advocacy strategy included that:

Prior to going to meetings I will always try to find out as much as I could. Who's going to be at the table and do any lobbying you can behind the scenes. If you can pull some strings somewhere else in the other room, do it. (A1, 457-459)

Again, this is a skill commensurate with the boardroom and may appear a contradiction to Indigenous leadership except that those skills would be very prevalent in contemporary contexts. It was the adoption and use of those skills that demonstrated adaptability. Responding to a question as to what she considered in regrouping to pursue an objective that may not have been achieved through the initial effort, Anna responded, “Maybe

determination and arming yourself, you know. Being armed with the proper ammunition if you will, you know. Knowledge is power and you have to get your facts and know who your players are” (A2, 685-687). Anna presented as very adept in acquiring and using skills commensurate with the arena that she entered.

Although Elaine’s narrative as one of adaptation and change, she demonstrated through her accomplishments that she worked to acquire the foundational skills commensurate with her role. As a young person that had come through an Indigenous teacher training program and worked exclusively in First Nations education, she faced obstacles similar to her peers. Elaine’s educational attainment was the most obvious mainstream acquisition to support her viability in the profession. A hallmark of her professional service was her vigilance in ensuring that she wasn’t disadvantaged in an imbalanced power relationship with the Department of Indian Affairs. Of her strategy of vigilance, Elaine indicated that, “I read everything two or three times because there is always, many times there’s a hidden meaning...” (E1, 829-830). Elaine also identified her characteristic tenacity as matching currency with her adversaries. She characterized her diligence in pursuing an objective with the self-assessment, “Yes, a bulldog, but I mean it’s true” (E1, 1042). She counted as a skill that she acquired, “...not backing down because we did have our detractors for sure” (E2, 112). Elaine’s experience demonstrated her prowess with the skills associated with leadership and the ability to maintain a staunch commitment to mastering the basic skills to foster change from within.

Equally committed to acquiring skills useful in his professional practice, Kenneth commented, “One of the things that administrators find the hardest is the willingness to



make decisions. Especially hard decisions” (K1, 333-334). He related decision-making as a skill of the mainstream that he worked very diligently to acquire. Kenneth established a linkage between his residential school experience and his need to deliberately acquire the ability to make decisions in his comment:

I also acknowledge that my lack of parental or parenting skills is as a result of the residential school experience. So where did I develop that sort of, “You need to make a decision?” It’s from watching the bosses that I had in the different positions that I was in and saying, yeah, if I get to that, those are the kinds of decisions that I have to make if I want to survive in that. Because I don't think you can be a manager without having to make tough decisions at some point. (K1, 372-378)

Kenneth effectively acquired the ability to make decisions noted in his comment, “That's one of my contributions, is not being afraid to make decisions” (K1, 340-341).

Referring to a teaching assignment early in his career, Kenneth recalled:

I did English and Math testing with students and then I collated all of the information. Wrote it all down. Made my charts and whatever else and my graphs and all that. Went into her and I said, “here it is. This is what it looks like.” She said, “can you explain it to the parent council?” I said, “sure I can.” (K1, 122-125)

When faced with a challenge, Kenneth worked to acquire and apply the skills necessary to address the challenges of the assignment.

In addition to technical skills, Kenneth developed a variety of leadership skills that served him in his professional practice. Kenneth addressed his reputation as a formidable opponent at the board table in his comment, “I wouldn't sit back for anything but my scrapping was on the table ... I will not back away from an argument if I feel really strongly about it...” (K1, 645-648). Despite that aggressive characterization, Kenneth conceded that work in the education sector is a human endeavour and that, “...when you're dealing with people you have to deal with people in a certain way, okay?

You've got to be fair and you always should be upfront with people" (K2, 826-828).

Kenneth's orientation to his work was that, "...the best way to make change is from within" (K2, 878-879). He worked hard to acquire skills commensurate with the mainstream and gain access to educational leadership. That was a platform that he then used to challenge the status quo in improving conditions for Indigenous students.

As the participants unfolded their professions within the context of Indigenous education, they assumed the dual challenge of mastering mainstream skills while acting outside of the establishment. The goal of this research is to witness the experience rather than to judge whether conformity or revolution prevails. If the experience of Indigenous educational leadership is the learning context, then the challenge of learning from that context includes learning about and making meaning from experiences as they are presented, rather than making judgment about what constitutes Indigenous participation. All participation of Indigenous people is Indigenous participation. Participation, in this instance, includes the acquisition of knowledge and skill associated with the mainstream in the pursuit of Indigenous ideals.

**Familiar Strategies.** In addition to referencing a variety of skills that the participants had acquired in the course of their leadership and service, they also called on strategies that they attribute to family or cultural influence. As we encounter the world, we act in relation to our interactions. The individual, as a part of the interactive equation, also influences the context. The discovery is not that the participants brought themselves into the equation but that their Indigeneity became a part of their contribution and interpretive lens.

Anna related a teaching that she acquired in a reference that:

...it comes from the teaching of whatever comes out of your mouth you can't bring it back... You have two ears for a purpose and one mouth. That means you are supposed to listen twice as much as you talk and that when you talk you have to be careful what comes out of that mouth because ... once it's out, it doesn't come back. (A2, 362-367)

Anna also shared, "Once you share an idea it's not yours anymore. I think we as First Nations people know that..." (A2, 355-356). Anna attributed characteristics of "...relationship building and trust" (A2, 594) as qualities aligned with Indigenous influence. She recalled that, prior to her father's passing, he imparted a teaching that, "...our youth ... are getting restless and it's our young people and the women who are going to make a difference ... and that's what we are seeing now" (A2, 419-422). She demonstrated her ability to attune to direct and subtle teachings that she integrated into her life and practice.

Of Indigenous influence, Kenneth referenced the attribute of speaking his Indigenous language in his comment that, "It has strengthened who I am. It really has" (K1, 938). He added, "...I use a lot of descriptors, paint a picture if you will, using words. I think that comes from being Aboriginal, from being Cree or Métis. As you are probably aware, our language is a very descriptive language..." (K2, 5-8). Kenneth spoke of using the Cree language as currency in working with Cree communities. He related an entertaining anecdote:

I have the Y dialect. Initially I had a tough time with it but as I got more into it ... I picked up the TH dialect and I was able to converse and then I'd still get laughed at every once in a while if I made a mistake. Put the TH in the wrong place and, you know, but we went with it. But especially with the Elders, it was all in Cree. And if there was something I didn't understand I would just say, what did he say or what did she say? And then the person that I was asking about often spoke English anyway, even the Elders, and they would just say, well if you don't know what I mean, here's what I mean! (K2, 155-162)

His use of the Cree language further helped him in that:

A lot of the people that I dealt with ... their first language was Cree. And so I was able to go in there and talk to them and if there was something that was in policy in our policy handbook that we needed to explain in such a way that they would understand, just slip into Cree and start talking, you know, and oh, that's what that means. (K2, 739-744)

Besides language, Kenneth also attributed his perspective on the primacy of the child to his Indigenous heritage. He stated, "I think if we start to think about our children differently ... to being our children, we begin to make those kinds of decisions that are better suited to make sure that our children benefit" (K1, 427-430). Kenneth referred to the value for leadership in understanding Indigenous and northern cultures. He commented, "The value of local representation is that the representative, if you will, understands the culture within which you work. And you understand the people as well, you know" (K2, 754-756). Kenneth referred to servant leadership as aligning with the teachings that he was familiar with. Kenneth commented, "...it was a natural fit for the way I did things... For me it fits really well..." (K2, 1076-1077). Kenneth associated his leadership style with teachings that he received, "from grandma and grandpa. They were very humble people, lived off the land, survived off the land" (K1, 1038-1039). The teaching was "*Tapahteyimowin*, which is kind of humility, you know, and I'm saying, I'm the leader but I don't have to be out there..." (K2, 1064-1065).

Elaine identified teachings that were instilled in her through her interaction with the community. She referred to including Elders in consultation and respecting the appropriate protocols in doing so. Elaine said, "...we always try to be inclusive, both in getting the Elders here and treating them the way they are supposed to be treated. Listening to them..." (E2, 560-561). She fondly recalled enlisting the support of the community in educational planning by adhering to community protocols. Of those

gatherings Elaine stated, “That’s what we do if, for example, it was ... time for hunting where you stock up for winter then we’d for sure have duck soup and bannock, dried meat... and invite the parents and invite the Elders...” (E1, 222-225). Elaine felt it was particularly important to be thoughtful when inviting school participation to keep in mind that, “...many of these are residential school survivors, but, when we have functions like this there are Elders from each community. We brought in two or three from each community... (E2, 525-527).”

Elaine is a proponent of tradition in education. She experienced early successes with her community in building an education system on cultural teachings. When looking for the characteristics of an effective classroom, Elaine inquired with teachers, “...what makes this different? ...what distinguishes this classroom with these students from this reserve with you being First Nations? What makes it different than any provincial school classroom” (E1, 456-460)? She aspired to classrooms that “...make our kids proud of who they are” (E1, 508). For her, to improve the quality of First Nations education, it’s “...back to the basics. It’s back to asking the Elders and having their input and having everything stem from there and so it's like a reawakening in a way...” (E1, 1116-1118).

The participants referenced strategies anchored in familial and community teachings. They reference those strategies in drawing on their strengths and identifying a through-line from their foundational capacity, to their accomplishments in educational leadership, to the future of Indigenous education.

**Innovated Strategies.** In referencing strategic approaches to their work and advocacy, the participants often referred to innovating or re-engineering strategies.

Those strategies were subtly or even overtly amalgams of mainstream leadership strategies and characteristics associated with their Indigenous worldview and life ways, as well as innovative strategies that were tailored to their environment and opportunity. Mostly, those strategies were a response to their needs through what they had available to them.

Elaine was an early innovator as was evident in her account of helping the community develop their iteration of an education system under Indian Control of Indian Education. Of developing a First Nations education act, Elaine contributed:

We built it on the families and ... then we asked them to go back and talk about how they would see this looking. ... So, then, they'd come back and we would meet again and further on down the line ... we would meet with them and then when we thought we had something we could share, we gathered everybody together and gave it to them... We put it on a deer hide. We had it hanging in our office... To me this has come full circle. This could be a Saskatchewan Education Act for First Nations. (E1, 1135-1148)

The development of a First Nations Education Act in the early days of Indian Control of Indian Education was certainly an innovative practice. Elaine described the beginning of a band-controlled school in her recollection that:

Getting the kids into Atco trailers in a circle and finding enough of them to put the kids in and finding playground equipment and then getting materials and not following the mold, breaking it, if we could, because we did do a lot of that. That's what I meant about the intention of ITEP. It was to take your First Nations knowledge and feed into it what you could from the Provincial curriculum, not the other way around. (E1, 156-161)

Her commission to innovate fostered the perspective that:

We're the best thinkers outside the box that you'll ever see because it's sort of ... how can you expect them to succeed when you give them half as much as you give someone else? We do a lot with that. We can't do everything but, man, we think outside the box to get it done... (E1, 378-381)

Elaine spoke of the license that she felt to use uniquely First Nations approaches to re-styling education for improved First Nations student outcomes. She recalled, “We tried really hard to not use the provincial curriculum but it's not like we didn't strive for the same end. Now we call them outcomes. You know, but it's the way you got there” (E1, 202-205). Elaine thrived on innovation and was appreciative that the communities, “...gave us leeway to try it” (E2, 49).

Kenneth continued the discourse relating innovative practices with his comment, “If you come up against something and it's not working, so go back to the drawing board. How else can we do this” (K1, 979-981)? Kenneth also related his approach to decision-making that blended respect for his community with a strategic engagement strategy:

...if you want change and you know what that change is, let the people come up with the ideas. But ... in a way that they come up with the ideas and say, “oh, good idea.” I think my strategy in some respects has been that. “I'd like to really go this way with this but I need some help. What are some of the ideas? What are some of the things that you'd like to see? Even as a principal I used to ask the staff and say, “we've got an issue here. How do you think we should deal with it?” And just let them go at it. (K1, 852-858)

Kenneth blended what he knew early in his career when developing an alternate education program. Kenneth recalled:

These were the ones that would come and say, “Oh, I don't want anything to do with this. I'm tired of learning Math. I'm tired of writing.” So we made it fun. We said, “Now we will do something different. We don't have to learn English the way it's written but I want you to write.” Oh, you want me to tell you?” Yes, I want you to write me a story,” you know. “We are going to go out and hunt rabbits... Experiential approach to teaching, you know. We went out and set nets in the winter and I said, “I don't want to make fishermen out of you. I don't want to make trappers out of you.” I said, “I want you to develop an appreciation for what your parents went through.” I said, “Because they didn't have the same opportunities that you have in education and you need to see the difference in there so you know what they went through.” I thought it was very successful. (K1, 170-182)

Kenneth situated his innovative approaches in the context of the time. Of the flourishing of Indigenous participation in education, Kenneth said:

I think people have been so used to not having that push from the Aboriginal sector or the Aboriginal culture, just wasn't there for the longest time. We just went merrily along, accepted what was being taught to us, you know. And sort of the awakening happened and people started to make change... (K1, 745-750)

In his role as director of education for First Nations schools, Kenneth fostered community voice and innovation. He recalled of an educational planning event:

...I took every last one of the school committee members and took them out to [location] and I said, we're going to spend the time here. We're going to walk through this. We're going to make changes as you see. I'm not going to say this needs to be changed. I'm going to give you what it is and you tell me whether it needs to be changed or not. We had a fantastic three days. They were open to the invitation. ...the end result was that people were then coming around and saying, my goodness, this was great. It gives us a chance. Now we understand it better. We've got input into it. We're going that direction and so it's something we buy into. (K2, 68-78)

Kenneth's innovative approach extended into school leadership. He recalled:

We weren't bound by, you've got to do provincial curriculum, you've got to do it this way. Even though it's band autonomy, you know. If you want your kids to succeed, your students to succeed, this is what you've got to do. I think it was a good thing we didn't know, or didn't feel that. We were sort of free reign and said, do it right and get it so our kids succeed out of all of this. (K2, 252-256)

Kenneth relied on innovation and adaptation as was evident in his comment, "...all the things that I do I approach in that way. What's a better way to do this" (K2, 682-683)?

He added, "If you come up against something and it's not working, so go back to the drawing board. How else can we do this" (K1, 979-981)?

Anna demonstrated no shortage of accomplishments enhanced by unique approaches to problem solving influenced by her acquired and inherent skills.

Formulating teams that benefited from her skill in fostering and sustaining relationships characterized her prolific record of building schools. She was steeped in kinship and



community, which she brought to bear in her working as part of a team. Those relational skills also served Anna well in resolving conflict. Anna recounted how she mediated between a First Nation and a provincial school division during a dispute over tuition. One of the most interesting accounts of her innovation is her role in contributing to the development of the Treaty Essential Learnings. Anna recalled:

I like to think I get good ideas. For instance, when [name] was Commissioner... we were at some kind of function ... chatting about what they were doing ... and the schools... We started talking about the CEL's, you know, the Common Essential Learnings, and I said, "I really like that process..." I said, "so we have this" and I said, "the process was good. It was effective. It's long lasting. Why can we not have Treaty Essential Learnings?" (A1, 580-593).

Anna combined her training and skill in the Common Essential Learnings with her knowledge and valuing of the Treaties to initiate an idea that got traction and came to fruition. Anna summed up, "So I always recall that conversation. That's where TEL's were born" (A1, 610).

The exemplary portraits extended analysis by building on the foundations of the individual depictions and the inquiry of the composite depiction. Focusing on the manner in which the participants approached their task yielded evidence of adopted strategies and leveraging familiar skills, as well as amalgams of the known and unknown in experiencing Indigenous educational leadership. It was the individual depictions that prompted me to recognize the skills and strategies employed in pursuing their goals. The strategies did not emerge in a crash of lightening, nor did I expect them to. At face value, their strategies may seem pedestrian. There are only so many ways to make decisions or secure resources. What are remarkable, though, are the strategies that were employed in the context of concern. From within a relegated space, the participants achieved the development of First Nations education against great odds.

## **Creative Synthesis**

Heuristic research encourages a multi-sensory approach to understanding the essence of a phenomenon of shared interest. Through a creative response, the complexity of an experience is leveraged as the researcher invests the whole self in coming to know what has prompted sleepless nights and restless waking. Understanding the complexity of one's relationship to experience is revealed incrementally. Kincheloe and Berry (2004) remind the reader that:

Bricoleurs understand in this context that they cannot use a theory of patriarchy to tell them what has happened in a particular situation but must dig, scratch, analyze from different angles and employ multiple research methods and interpretive strategies to examine different aspects of the situation. (p. 29)

Phenomenology encourages "... experiment with many forms of analysis -- making metaphors, developing matrices and tables, and using visuals -- to convey simultaneously breaking down the data and reconfiguring them into new forms" (Creswell, 2007, p. 43). The creative synthesis commits to "interpretation [a]s an act of imagination and logic. It entails perceiving importance, order, and form in what one is learning that relates to the argument, story, narrative that is continually undergoing creation" (Peshkin, 2000, p. 9). Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) state that reducing to an essence of experience accommodates being "... 'thrown into' a world of objects, relationships, and language..." (p. 18) as the phenomenological overlay positions meaning within those contextual factors rather than making those factors meaning themselves. Those are the challenges and opportunities that I saw in the creative synthesis. I longed to step out of the familiar and challenge myself with meaning making in a way that would honour the participants.

I have taken some appropriate license in the preceding stages of this heuristic research, as would a bricoleur. I have assumed a first person perspective of the

participants to ensure that their factual and conceptual portrayals were accessible. Each of those pieces challenged me in my comfort zone. I had to stretch to avoid reverting to a logical-sequential analysis that relied solely on distilled themes for analysis. Along with challenging myself, I wished to finally honour the participants in a manner fitting given their deep investment. Having read many examples of heuristic research, I have seen creative syntheses presented as poetry, prose and photograph, just to name a few. I aspired to be truly creative in the creative synthesis but didn't believe that I had the creative skill to do justice to a truly creative synthesis.

I cannot recall how it made itself known to me but I had a glimpse of a flower beadwork design that could be interpreted to represent the experience of the participants. I cannot recall exactly when it happened, but just as soon as I imagined the finished product of the creative synthesis, I could see each individual image and I could tell the story behind each. I remember writing the litany of description down as soon as I could for fear of losing what I had *discovered*. I want to dispel any notion of magical thought or divine inspiration for if anyone had been thinking about the participants, their experiences and the phenomenon of interest for as long as I had, sudden images of clarity were welcome and anticipated.

Although I am familiar with another type of beadwork and have created some elaborate pieces, I had never undertaken flower beadwork before. Flower beadwork is deeply rooted in my Cree-Métis family and I always imagined that at some point I would learn the art. I actually tried to talk myself out of an artistic response, as I was sure it was an art form far beyond reach with my limited skillset. Unable to shake the image, I sought advice from experienced beaders, borrowed a guidebook and DVD (Scofield &

Briley, 2011) and commenced my first flower beadwork piece. I drew out the piece in one take, purchased the materials and set to work. It took many hours to complete the first piece of three that I gifted to the participants. I encountered countless finger-pokes and frustrating thread-reversals when I inadvertently stitched in the wrong direction. I had to secure a magnifying light when my fifty-year old eyes failed to adjust to the close work. I even experienced the hopelessness of knocking my bead container over with an inadvertent elbow nudge and wondering how to pick up hundreds of beads from the carpeted floor of my home office.

Although my flower beadwork is amateur, at best, compared with those that are skilled in their art form, I was also motivated by the desire to step out of my comfort zone. I felt it was necessary to be unsettled to really think through the language that I would use to define the experience of Indigenous educational leadership. Throughout the hours and days that I beaded those pieces, I thought of the participants and their sacrifices and victories. There was no way to approach a challenging and time consuming task than through ceremony. The sacrifices of the participants motivated me forward and throughout the process I thought of them. I thought of the times that they were so pre-occupied with their work that their families may have felt the sting of neglect. I thought of their defeats and felt the pain of their disappointment. I reflected on their victories and smiled at some of the brash anecdotes that I encountered. Mostly I used the time that I sat beading as prayer for the participants and their peers who also contributed to wrestling Indigenous education from the government of Canada and returning it to our First Nations communities. My first attempt at the flower beadwork creative synthesis appears in Figure 4.2. It is filled with the most imperfections of the three but it is the most

authentic, including my mistakes and corrections and representing a most imperfect perfection as an appropriate tribute to the participants and their experiences.

Figure 2. Flower Beadwork Creative Synthesis



Figure 2. Flower Beadwork Creative Synthesis. The leaves and flowers represent characteristics of the participants' experience in Indigenous educational leadership.

### The Creative Synthesis

This is a hopeful plant, reaching up towards the sunlight in spite of the weight of its foliage and flowers. It is not like anything you've ever seen before, being a collection of some of the most brilliant colours in nature: earth tones and radiant translucence that play in the sunlight. There are seven leaves spiraling off the stem to represent seven generations. Seven generations past, those ancestors were building the warriors of today, not knowing the battles that they would encounter. Those warriors, in turn, are putting things in order and reclaiming what was threatened so that those in seven generations feel the strength of those that came before them in an unbroken line of wisdom, strength and love. A single withered leaf falls away to honour the hurt and sacrifice of our past and present leaders while representing a letting go of that burden of pain to allow for new growth. The first flower, with its four petals, represents the strength of teachings and modeling and preparing the environment for the work and successes of these warriors that their families and communities provided. That flower honours all of

the teachings and values and protocols that were instilled, even before birth. The second flower is identical except for the additional petal that adorns it. That flower represents innovations in taking what was given to them through birthright and building on it through their own agency and inspiration. The third flower is love. The heart-shaped petals represent family and the compassion of the family extended to all of the children that they have worked on behalf of throughout their careers. The fourth flower has yet to emerge. It is an amalgam of the three flowers that preceded it, representing the progression of time and experience that draws history forward into the present and future. It buds with potential of continued change and growth and holds all the promise of a renewed future. The composite is an inspiring story of resilience and hope that serves as a testament to these gentle warriors who have blessed the trail with their tears and pointed in the direction of a renewed future so that others may follow.

#### **Trickster Text 4**

*You again, my brother! How's it going? Is everything all right? Where are you going? You're going on a journey? Wow, that's a long ways. No, I've never been there. Yes, you will get thirsty along the way. Sure, I can spare a bit of water. Here you go. Yes, you will need something to challenge your mind on that long a journey. I'm not sure... Wait, look at this! I've been trying to figure this out for ages! Take it! It's yours! I couldn't get it anyways. Anything else? You're right. Prayer will help. You've got to have faith, my brother. Hey! I've got a spare song that you can have! Sure, no problem! Take it! I can always get another. Nice and slow. Hey, yah. Hey, yah. That's it. You've got it. You should be good to go.*

*You know, you are going to encounter a lot of people along the way. Oh, I'm sure you're ready for that. You know, it would be good to have a little extra emotion. It can't hurt? Just to be on the safe side. It helps to really understand those that you encounter. It could get you out of some tight spots. Here it is. It's easy to use. There are just four easy questions that you'll have to answer to prove you're worthy of its use. Hey, I don't make the rules! O.K., think of the person you look up to the most. Ready? Where does*

*she live? Right! That was easy! Just three more to go. Second question. That same person, what is her favourite dinner? Right! That's two for two! Third question. What is she good at? Exactly! You're making this look easy! O.K., one more to go. Hmmm. Let me think. O.K., I've got it! What worries her? Well? What do you mean that's not fair? You know her, don't you? You've been listening to her? You see what's been going on? You've asked her that question yourself, haven't you? Oh, I see... I gotta go, have a safe journey, brother!*

### **Seeing with Your Heart: A Response to the Creative Synthesis**

Seeing with your heart. Wilson (2015) described that "...the term *Sakihiwawin* declares our commitment to love in action" (p. 260). The journey of getting to know the participants through their association with the experience of Indigenous educational leadership yielded legitimacy of context, association and strategies motivated by love. Ultimately, the research journey set out to use the phenomenon of interest as context to look more deeply in recognizing and affirming strategies and resourcefulness. The process endeavoured to raise consciousness in relation to the phenomenon of interest and, ultimately, raise consciousness for Indigenous educational leaders.

As I conducted the interviews I was able to intuitively orient to the most revealing and emotional contributions. It was those contributions that haunted me with thoughts of the participants' sacrifice, loss and marginalization. Equally, I was enraptured with the compelling accounts of innovation, standing ground and victory. I reacted to those compelling descriptions of experiences in the same manner that I initially reacted with emotion to the phenomenon of interest. Of my compelling interest in the phenomenon, I

employed my emotional response as a bridge to thought and imagination. Of the participants' emotional revelations, I also experienced emotional and creative responses.

The experiences of the participants could be viewed through different lens as has been demonstrated through the first three filters of individual depiction, composite depiction and exemplary portrait. Those lenses focused on place, role and strategy. At each stage, my reflection and thought caused different qualities to rise to the top and oriented to a conceptual analysis. Now I bring forward the evidence that caused me to prepare the creative synthesis. The organizer for the creative synthesis was raised consciousness. It was the participants who contributed the substance that precipitated my raised consciousness. I employed the evidence from the participants that provoked in me the most visceral reactions and through *wisahkêcâhk's* provocation, pushed myself to a revelation useful in better understanding the phenomenon of Indigenous educational leadership.

**A Hopeful Plant.** I recall travelling back from a northern Saskatchewan community where I had interviewed one of the participants. As I drove through a near whiteout blizzard, I tried to keep my singular focus on the road while replaying the interview in my head. I was feeling a loss of camaraderie with the individual because his experience appeared so rich compared to mine. Granted, I had a few years to go to catch up with him but his professional experiences were marked with such challenge and accomplishment. He, like all of the participants, intensely exuded hope. His words were hopeful but it was his actions that revealed his propensity to create change and be buoyed by that change, however incremental.



I found great hope in Anna's recollection of what drove her heroic actions. Even when recalling great battles to achieve resources on behalf of the community, she said, "...it's before and seeing the dire need is what drives you to get things better for that community. And I just happen to be in that position... (A2, 231-233). It was that type of comment that illustrated a belief that *if* she were to act in light of the context, *then* improvement would follow. That comment was indicative of all three of the participants. The Provocateur queries how hope characterizes Indigenous educational leadership. Hope is not proprietary. Hope entails, though, the ability to see downstream and choose a path that removes some of the risk of reaching the destination. I was hopeful that I would get home through the blizzard because I was driving a vehicle suited to the climate in a manner suited to the conditions. Hope is informed and confident. The participants talked of plans and strategies and influences. Their hope was built on readiness and hard work. Their hope was commensurate with their position as leader anchored in the past and looking to the future.

**Seven Leaves Spiraling.** Seven generations teachings are humbling as they illustrate the enormity of a people over time and the flash of our influence along the continuum. The women particularly humbled me as they made life-changing decisions for service when they had so many responsibilities before them. They were exercising their leadership at a time when women were experiencing more difficult access than men and compounded marginalization through non-Indigenous and Indigenous misogynist social environments. Making decisions that might affect me and my family is difficult enough but making decisions with a long view to intergenerational change is truly daunting. I was particularly bothered by a comment that Anna made that when asked to

come home and serve her community, she replied, “Okay. I’ll come home... But by that time I was divorced so I didn’t even really like being there, so I said only as long as it takes to get the school. That’s how long I’ll stay” (A1, 272-274). I discerned that my growing up with a single mother caused me see the personal sacrifice that would have been encountered in that situation for the good of the community.

Elaine also shared her allegiance to the people, past and future, in her belief that even as a seasoned Indigenous educational leader that, “If somebody put me on the spot, I would hesitate because I wouldn’t want to put ... the little bits and pieces that I culled from the ... First Nations and actually say this is what they want” (E1, 438-440). Elaine consistently deferred to the communities that enlisted her support. She was cognizant of not assuming voice but acting only in regard to what she experienced and was commissioned with.

*Wîsahkêcâhk* challenges that anyone with a past and a future is part of the continuum. In relation to Indigenous educational leadership, I imagine a tightrope walker. What is holding each end is as important as what is in the middle. By virtue of being a part of a seven generations culture, one assumes a tightrope walker mindset. That characteristic is not only how it causes one to act but also how it causes one not to act. Acting on a belief in the primacy of seven generations displaces self-aggrandizement and individuality. I certainly heard of drivers such as community and kinship and that caused me to contextualize the phenomenon within an intergenerational context.

**A Single Withered Leaf.** The emotional part of my being allows me to be attuned to subtle and unnecessary human suffering. Hearing of people’s hurt causes me to advocate alleviating the conditions that caused the hurt. So much of what the

participants related illustrated the sacrifices that they made in exercising their profession. We might all do so to some extent but their professional practice was characterized by their kinship in the marginalized challenging the status quo. Anna recalled that, "...those kids do not think anything of death. It was just so common an experience for them" (A1, 117-118). Elaine spoke of loss in her comment that, "We were colleagues and good friends and always talked about this stuff. But there isn't very many and now she's not here either" (E1, 677-678). Another time she shared that, "Sometimes you get pretty worn down" (E1, 564). Kenneth related, "I spent a lot of time in residential school. We weren't allowed to make decisions..." (K1, 349-350). Those glimpses of hurt failed to characterize the participants but undergirded their experiences with a context characterized by struggle and sacrifice.

*Wisahkêcâhk* queries who hasn't experienced hurt? There is no credible response to that question as it is part of the human condition. Characteristic, though, are Indigenous experiences resulting from colonization. Those experiences are a rich source of meaning as they invoke images of resistance and resilience. Owning the hurt is less important than recognizing its presence, contributing factors and the strength of a people to thrive despite externally imposed limitations. In hindsight, I began to learn to celebrate their pain and disappointments as answering back to much greater forces of diminishment. What could have consumed them made them stronger.

**The First Flower: Family.** The participants celebrated the influence of their families and communities just as they expressed their allegiance to them. They credited much to the strong influences of their families, whether natural or adopted. I was able to achieve such a rich understanding of their influences that I could appreciate their

influences just as much as I appreciated them. Anna spoke of her influential role models with pride in her comment that, “I wish that we had that in our leadership. The fortitude that those guys did. That drive. That passion” (A1, 770-771). Elaine painted a picture of acceptance in her community with, “...we go and do report cards at the kitchen table with a lot of tea and bannock ‘till we were full and satisfied. Satisfied because there was acceptance” (E1, 242-243). Kenneth recalled, “I was the lucky one... I spent all my summers with my grandparents. That's how I got my language” (K1, 948-950).

*Wîsahkêcâhk* inquires don't we all have families? The participants told stories of their families and communities. Their Indigenous context defined those families through kinship lineage rich in teachings of place and history. I was fortunate to hear anecdotes that were situated in meaningful contexts engineered to sustain teachings and heritage. Their leadership was an extension of those histories that placed an imperative on the participants just as it gifted them with knowledge and skills honed over time.

**The Second Flower: Innovation.** At the outset of this study, innovation sounded grand. What I found was that innovation was as humble as water, always seeking the lowest point. Also like water, it was immensely powerful. I came to see innovation in subtle influences such as Elaine acquiring the academic qualifications to assume responsibility that would have otherwise not been available to her. She commented, “And then I moved right into my Master's. I went from a B.Ed. to an M.Ed. and finished them both in two years” (E1, 100-102). Innovation was in Kenneth modeling his career after decision makers that he had witnessed while engineering his leadership after, “*Tapahteyimowin*, which is kind of humility, you know, and I'm saying, I'm the leader

but I don't have to be out there. I don't have to hang my shingle and say I'm your leader and you need to follow me” (K2, 1064-1066).

The participants used what was available to them in a manner that countered the social and political will of the time geared to diminishing Indigenous influence.

*Wisahkêcâhk* questions whether any career could be assessed as grand and innovative in hindsight? To that I respond that Indigenous educational leaders innovated a tool called Indigenous education over the last forty years. Each act of building a First Nations educational infrastructure constituted an act of innovation while systems development within an under-resourced and neglected context constitutes revolution.

**The Third Flower: Love.** I came to respect the participants immensely but did not place them on a pedestal. It was their humanity that I respected. Like any of us, they were sometimes ambitious or competitive. Inevitably, though, their initiative traced a line back to their emotional commitment to their families, their communities and all Indigenous children and youth. Of working in a residential school, Anna recalled, “I felt guilty when I would leave them. When I left them. It was just like they were fending for themselves” (A2, 199-200). Of her willingness to intervene with others when she felt that the children’s dignity was at risk, Anna commented: “...you need to have empathy for those kids and understand where they are coming from” (A2, 400-401). Of the lasting respect that Anna received as a result of her commitment to children in need, Anna commented:

...you just kind of knew that they needed extra. Like they didn't have parents. I guess I might have become kind of a surrogate parent to many of those students because even now like they still call me. Like some of them are grandparents already! (A2, 183-186)

Equally, Elaine acknowledged that passion travels near the surface with her recognition that:

I sometimes sound like I'm going to cry. I'm getting a bit better at that but it's the passion. The passion will bring that out in me but it's not tears. It's just passion and I'm pretty blunt sometimes. I try and not be. (E1, 552-554)

*Wisahkêcâhk* states that love is as common as the perpetuation of the human race.

Characteristic of the participants and their experience was the drawing down of love as a tool in the protection and proliferation of Indigenous heritage. Of the multitude of ways that a response to experience could have been crafted, love prevailed.

**Budding With Potential.** Canada is currently experiencing an unprecedented professional, social and political renewal of commitment and innovation in Indigenous education. The participants evidenced potential in what they precipitated. Potential was evident in subtle and overt statements such as Anna stating, “I didn't tell you [about] my kids, they're wonderful!” (A1, 837). I was so very pleased to hear that comment as it is in generations to follow that potential resides. Referencing potential, Elaine shared, “...our students are up and comers and you'll see that by the Idle No More movement...” (E2, 268-269). Elaine exemplified optimism in her comments that, “I've learned to find the positives as much as possible and give the Creator thanks for the little things because the little things often do turn out to be a bigger thing down the road” (E2, 670-672). Elaine characterized youth in a positive frame with her comment that:

This generation is not the generation that is just sitting back and waiting for it to happen. It's a ... go get 'em kind of thing and we have a lot of graduates. We have lawyers. We have anything that you can imagine, we have them, but they're never touted enough, you know. But I've said to the principals when we meet, we talk a lot about the Idle No More, and I said, this is your opportunity to teach the things that need to be taught in your school, about your language, your culture. Also the power of voting. (E2, 282-289)

*Wisahkêcâhk* cautions that contexts change and people act in relation to those contexts and that the future is uncertain. The education sector, though, is uniquely situated to build capacity for sustained change and the participants fostered that dynamic.

The creative synthesis is an opportunity to view complex histories in a holistic and affirming manner. Seeing with your heart entails knowing where you stand. Awareness of one's physical presence within a discernible context fosters understanding of influence that shapes potential and opportunity. Awareness of what you know within that context of influence helps to assess knowledge foundations and knowledge gaps that can help or hinder one's influence, but must always be viewed as potential within the context of a continuum. Questions of emotion help to orient one to the task in a manner that accounts for influential experiences on the individual and the population as a whole, in both contemporary and historical fashion. Understanding influences and their impact helps to see a way forward unencumbered by self-doubt and self-imposed limitations. Ultimately, seeing what one believes helps to strengthen resolve and reinforce belonging within the context of the community that helps to break down the isolation of the experience and foster hope for change.

### **Conclusion**

Through the interweaving of the voices of the participants, my own voice and that of the Provocateur, I have come to the foundations that the participants stand on, what motivates them, what causes them pause and what they chose to do as agents of change. Ultimately, I have come to know their passion and commitment to their communities, especially the children. What I have learned what was offered up selflessly and, in the mode of heuristic research, it was up to the researcher to make sense of the experience of

interest to offer something worth considering as a way forward. That way forward will be explored in chapter five.



## **CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS**

This chapter coalesces the metaphors prevalent in the research into a decolonizing leadership heuristic that builds on the reflective heuristic employed in analysis. Through the lens of the heuristic, each of the phases of interpretation is revisited and applied to the discourse and practice of Indigenous educational leadership. I present implications of the research for Indigenous educational leadership as well as for leadership practice, policy and theory. The chapter concludes with recommendations for further research and my reflection on the research process.

### **A Decolonizing Leadership Heuristic**

The individual depictions, composite depiction, exemplary portraits and creative synthesis each came together to extrapolate themes present in the participants' words. Each stage drew on the same texts but focused on a different concept along a continuum of the experience as I spent more time with the texts and thought more deeply about what the experiences were telling me. With the individual depictions, I was struck with the positioning that I saw in the texts. What stood out for me was evidence of staking a claim in the place that the participants found themselves by anchoring their legitimacy along a continuum of family and community passions and pursuits. Equally, they positioned themselves in their role by articulating their mission in reclaiming space. Their professional practice was a foray into unknown territory to reclaim what was in jeopardy of being lost.

The composite depiction surfaced questions related to the participants' readiness to take on the tasks that were presented to them, their confidence in the selection and use of the various strategies that they employed in pursuing their goals and their

effectiveness. That is not to say that they felt insecure or inadequate. On the contrary, these are confident and accomplished professionals. Still, the questions that were raised, even as calibrating sidebars to great careers, helped to describe what took place within a context established as their own.

The exemplary portraits helped me to focus on the knowledge and skills that the participants employed. The participants told of leadership strategies that they worked hard to develop, as they were deemed to be characteristic of their roles. They spoke of strategies that they anchored in a foundation of familiarity in families, communities, language or heritage. Mostly, they spoke of adopting and adapting as necessary to advance their objectives. Ultimately, their experiences told stories of love and service. Despite what I had drawn on at each stage that elicited a new approach to analysis, the fundamental narrative was one of impassioned efforts to bridge from a proud past to a hopeful future.

As the stages unfolded, I could envision them as a continuum useful in analyzing their contributions, but also useful as a heuristic in examining Indigenous educational leadership, biographically or autobiographically. I imagined a decolonizing leadership heuristic that considered the phenomenon of interest the interplay of the individual within their context. That approach held potential to focus on strategies in context and better understand leadership imperatives with reference to time, place and circumstance. Where Indigenous leadership is assessed uncoupled from context, opportunity to learn from experience is jeopardized. Even where context differs, establishing that self in relation to phenomenon matters is a liberating perspective as it invokes agency. That perspective fosters self-assessment focused on learning from experience by claiming the experience

and Indigenous educational leadership appraised through claiming, discerning, deep reflection and assertive learning.

A decolonizing leadership heuristic, though, is not only a collective of concepts gleaned from texts. It must be useful as a tool that those on a decolonizing trajectory employ in the decolonizing enterprise. The call for such a tool has been subtle but gleaned from challenges such as that of Calliou & Wesley-Esquimaux (2014) who argued:

...there is something missing in how Indigenous community and leadership development is approached (Snowball and Wesley-Esquimaux 2010; Thomas 2007). They argue that an approach other than best practices must be developed, one that makes a space for Indigenous knowledge, experiences, and stories “learned on the frontlines through socio-cultural insight, ingenuity, intuition, long experience, and trial and error” (Thomas 2007, 8). (p. 42)

Educational leaders reside in a world of prolific heuristics that make tangible complex and competing models of development and effectiveness that no more speak to Indigenous leadership than the theory that spawned the models. A decolonizing leadership heuristic must address that:

From an anti-oppressive perspective, knowledge does not exist in and of itself, isolated from people. Rather, it is produced through the interactions of people, and as all people are socially located (in their race, gender, ability, class identities, and so on), with biases, privileges, and differing power relations, so too is the creation of knowledge socially located, socially constructed. (Potts & Brown, 2005, p. 261)

Without the tools to assess and apply Indigenous knowledges in context, Indigenous leaders risk reflecting their growth and development against unfamiliar tools calibrated to oppressive Western experiences of leadership. Employing heuristic research focuses on a phenomenon that challenges the status quo and results in a heuristic useful in supporting learning as resistance. Indigenous cultures are replete with heuristics evident in

ceremony, cultural practices and metaphors. To add to heuristics for living, relating and service, a decolonizing leadership heuristic adds a new tool useful in contemplating participation and progress in a familiar and appreciative manner.

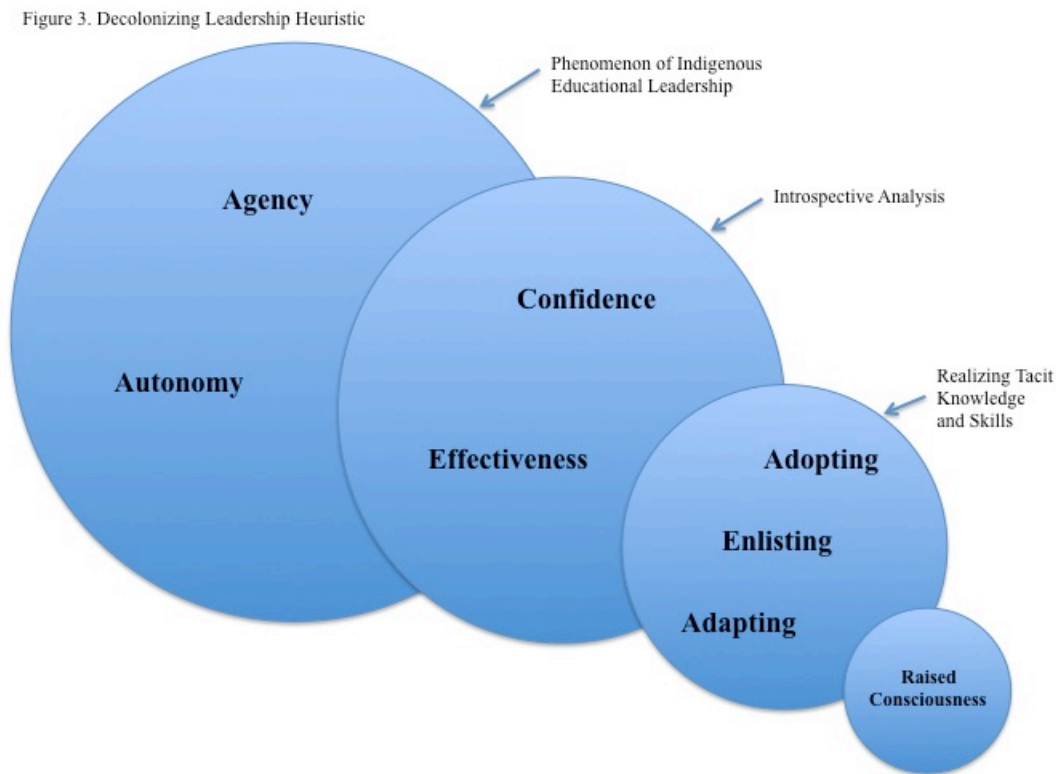


Figure 3. Decolonizing Leadership Heuristic. The phenomenon of Indigenous educational leadership is defined by Agency and Autonomy. Introspection addressed questions of Confidence and Effectiveness. Knowledge and skills are recognized as Adopted, Enlisted and Adapted, resulting in Raised Consciousness.

### Gathering Useful Bits

Where the bricolage promotes knowledge generated through an amalgam (Kincheloe and Berry, 2004), the lens of the Trickster adds value by prompting search for the tacit and examination of the obvious for the less than obvious. As the Trickster bricolage is applied to Indigenous educational leadership, it seeks knowledge where necessary while maintaining value for and learning from the unknown. The lopsided

colonizing journey that diminished Indigenous contribution did not instill an appreciative lens on Indigenous participation. Valuing the unknown and making it known celebrates knowledge and skills that Indigenous educational leaders may not identify without the deliberate adoption of appreciative analysis resulting from enlivening discourse on the experience of Indigenous educational leadership. Each of the following sections explores a stage of the decolonizing leadership heuristic by deliberately drawing forth pieces of knowledge and skills with an appreciative lens. A Trickster bricolage analytical attitude is employed that scrounges, provokes, exchanges and fashions. As each element is discovered, it is described in relation to the experience of Indigenous educational leadership. Those useful bits are assembled into a raised consciousness medicine bundle useful in navigating the Indigenous educational leadership journey.

### **Claiming the Phenomenon**

As was illustrated in the individual depictions, Indigenous educational leaders lay claim to the phenomenon of interest by naming their place in relation to the phenomenon and by situating themselves through a mission orientation.

**Agency.** The participants navigated a landscape that they and their communities won by force. Their participation in the education sector answered back to a culture of exclusion. They had not been invited in but crashed the gates through social consciousness and political opportunity. Buoyed by theirs' and the larger Indigenous community, the participants lay claim to their place along the continuum with humility and deference. In honouring their ancestors, role models, teachers and those who initiated the struggle, they defined their agency. No longer were they vulnerable to definition by or expectations of others. Their arrival within the phenomenon of interest

was preconceived. Consistent with McLeod's (2007) concept of Cree Narrative Imagination, the participants drew on their past to shape their future. McLeod (2007) wrote:

Cree narrative imagination is another aspect of Cree narrative memory: it is a way of drawing upon the past and the present and projecting these elements into the future. Cree imagination is overtly futuristic in its orientation, which is embodied within our lives and bodies, and can reshape our social space. It is quintessentially an Indigenous conception and practice of theory. (p. 94)

McLeod described the acts of contemporary Indigenous people in a context influenced by deference and respect to the acts of our cultural forerunners as he prompted the contemporary to act, as did their ancestors, and create an agentic legacy.

As Indigenous educational leaders assumed agency, they began to retain energy otherwise lost in questioning their place. The often-embattled place of Indigenous peoples in Western society cast a pall over their experience that did not allow their ingenuity and success to be appraised. Indigenous educational leaders recognized their place along the continuum and assumed ownership of their niche in the decolonizing enterprise. Calliou and Wesley-Esquimaux (2014) employed a wise practices approach to community development that "...involves a journey backwards in order to move forwards (p. 45)." Assessing the journey and placing initiative along a continuum recognized Indigenous contributions. As agency is recognized and assumed, it becomes a motivating characteristic that Indigenous educational leaders recognize, value, seek and celebrate. *Wisahkêcâhk* went through great lengths to hide it so obviously that it behooves leaders to pick it up and place it in their bundle.

**Autonomy.** The narrative of Indigenous educational leadership is one driven by mission. Those professionals were born into a context framed by the needs of all to

participate in a liberating experience. While many professionals may be mission driven, the decolonizing commission is discernible in Indigenous communities. The participants laid claim to their autonomy as they assumed responsibility to right injustices, claim participation, secure resources and re-establish voice. Those actions counter marginalization by refusing to wait for what might be handed out and coming into the storehouse and taking it. The narrative shifted from victim to victor. Telling of the needs within their communities allowed the participants to be deliberate about using their position to take back what was rightfully theirs. Reframing the narrative associated with colonization and ensuring that reclaiming served as the vernacular for Indigenous leaders characterized the warrior pursuit and normalized the reclaiming ethic. Autonomy is in the liberation from acting as others perceive normal by elevating the acts of resistance and reclaiming to legitimate acts for Indigenous peoples in response to settler cultures.

The agentic and autonomous Indigenous educational leader need no longer enter the arena for contest. That is not to say that contest may not be necessary, but if Indigenous struggles and rebirth are imagined as part of the journey, the actions along the continuum may be viewed as strategy commensurate with experience. Laying claim to acts of Indigenous educational leadership fashions the archetype as it secures victories. Sarra (2011) experienced much the same in his analysis of schools effect on Australian Aboriginal students. He wrote:

Schools that are led by individuals who have a positive and accurate understanding of Aboriginal perceptions of being Aboriginal, to the extent that they value and ensure they are guided by Aboriginal leadership, will challenge, nurture and embrace Aboriginal students who will undoubtedly become stronger and smarter. (p. 169)

That quotation speaks to the value of perception and the value of gaining ground through decolonization as an Indigenous pursuit that was commissioned by the generations that sustained the leaders of today. There is more value in one's pursuit being of one's own volition rather than it being a response to oppression. Indigenous leaders have been modeling that ethic of autonomy for generations. It is gaining ground cumulatively as is evident in the contemporary Indigenous social movement of Idle No More. Still, ownership of their mission and purpose was by the trail, partially exposed, and now goes into the bundle.

A decolonizing leadership heuristic raises implications related to the phenomenon of Indigenous educational leadership. Agency may raise implications for how the leader promotes a legitimizing narrative among a similarly displaced community. Agency might also raise questions of allies in assessing who else might also be coming to terms with a renewed claim. Autonomy might have implications for how to define a mission arising from a legitimized struggle or how to justify a legitimized role with larger systems that might not yet endorse the role of decolonizing leader. For the change leader to experience isolation or ambiguity is detrimental to moral and effectiveness. Whether undertaken alone or among a community of Indigenous educational leaders, responses to inquiries of agency and autonomy help to establish a foundation of leadership anchored in Indigenous community, therefore displacing externally imposed conceptualizations of leadership. Those considerations might be cursory or they may contribute to tangible associations among peers and statements of purpose. Either way, the model contributes to defining place and purpose as pathways to effectiveness.



## **Introspective Leadership**

Through the composite depiction, questions of confidence and effectiveness arose. Those questions surfaced in the narratives not as doubt but as opportunity to calibrate and assess readiness, strengths, gaps and opportunities. The types of self-inquiry that arose could be viewed as an astute leadership assessment reflective tool. Inverted, each of the themes of inquiry sought core leadership characteristics, core competencies and progress assessment strategies. The dearth of Indigenous educational leaders in Saskatchewan educational leadership may be attributed to the gatekeepers. A lack of recruitment, hiring and retention is tantamount to deliberate exclusion. That gap in representative leadership may also be a result, in part, of confidence gaps in Indigenous leadership. Most unlikely is that the gap is a result of capacity deficits. Indigenous educational leaders operate in the most underfunded and difficult circumstances in the province and still achieve graduation rates for Indigenous students similar to the higher funded and less challenging provincial school systems. As a result, “differences in educational attainment between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations in Canada continue to mar the country’s efforts to foster educational equity” (Steeves, Carr-Stewart and Marshall, 2010). Among Indigenous educational leaders, skills and knowledge are present but awareness and endorsement of skills and knowledge must be advanced. It is the questions that emerged from the participants’ self-dialogue that have the potential to contribute to an Indigenous leadership framework and serve as strengths-based points of departure in assessing skills and knowledge.

**Confidence.** Questions that the participants raised regarding their confidence in the tasks that they were confronted with resulted from the gap between the known and the

unknown. Of course, all three of the participants are deemed to be highly successful in their profession. Their questions spoke to the need to establish and sustain a vibrant practitioners' discourse on Indigenous educational leadership to start to view struggles and doubts as context specific and to assess and compile a framework of successful practices useful in ensuring that the continuum is recognized and that individual practitioners do not continue to feel the sting of isolation. Viewed as questions characteristic of the experience rather than doubts of individuals, they constituted reflective practice. With the establishment of a common discourse on the experience of Indigenous educational leadership, an appreciative lens useful in strategically understanding challenges and in assembling a strengths-based response emerged.

Confidence is an attribute that is typically built rather than one that is innate. Of course, confidence useful in educational leadership is best advanced with competence (Ralph & Walker, 2011). Discourse on Indigenous educational leadership is cursory at best, which leaves the practitioners vulnerable to recognizing the specifics that set them apart from the mainstream without theory to endorse that uniqueness. Confidence can respect humility and need not be boastful but it helps to know, and to know you know, when undertaking complex tasks associated with Indigenous educational leadership. Confidence was well hidden and difficult to pick up but in small measure, is an important tool that also goes in the bundle.

**Effectiveness.** The participants identified multiple successes associated with their professional practice. Those were successes in their own right and successes more so given that they were instigated from the margins. While questioning efficacy is complicated with diverse measures of success looming over Indigenous education, the

relatively short time that Indigenous peoples have participated in mainstream education and the outcomes assessed within context certainly identified developing systems in Indigenous education. Still, in contemporary educational design, questioning effectiveness is not perceived as a deficit but strength. Education has evolved from appraising success by effervescence (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009) to predicting and measuring success based on student needs assessment, strategically formulated interventions and pre-determined outcome measures. The participants' questioning is evidence that there is contest over what constitutes effective practice in Indigenous educational leadership.

Useful for Indigenous educational leadership would be a more deliberate and sustained discourse of the role of Indigenous educational leadership in precipitating Indigenous student success. The capacity of Indigenous educational leaders is more evident in articulating Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy and could also be significant in articulating Indigenous student improvement practices as well. In a system still reeling from the interruption of traditional learning constructs and the piecemeal imposition of a Western education, perspectives of the practitioners engineering the successes should be paramount and, most importantly, not impeded by ambiguity and self-doubt. The criteria for success in Indigenous educational leadership were deeply embedded in the landscape with only shards visible to the eye. With the spark of excitement in recognition of contextually remarkable achievements, the participants picked up those bits and put them in their bundles.

Considering confidence and effectiveness need not be self-pathologizing challenges but opportunity to inventory skills that contribute to confidence. At scale, a

vibrant discourse on Indigenous educational leadership criteria might emerge. Assessing effectiveness might contribute to a success narrative that accounts for the uniqueness of challenges in an Indigenous context. Indigenous educational leaders might ask what they believe about their readiness to lead and assemble strategies to assess effectiveness. That discernment, individual or communal, would result in a counterbalance to the diminishing colonial narrative on Indigenous leadership. Ultimately, promoting a cycle of introspective analysis on confidence and effectiveness that stems from an appreciative stance helps to displace negative self-talk that is characteristic of leading and living in a colonized space.

### **New Tools from Practice**

As much as this research focused on the knowledge and skills engineered in the margins, the expectation was always that this was recognition of the tacit. Aiming to elevate the tacit to consciousness is a subtle exercise that came without an expectation of uncovering a whole host of clandestinely engineered strategies. On the contrary, what could be counted as strategic emerged from stories of acquiring knowledge and skills commensurate with the mainstream, drawing on gifts situated in familial and cultural realms and, mostly, engineering a response appropriate for the task at hand and from that which was readily available. That recognition endorsed the lens of the bricoleur in anticipating that from amalgams of participation and exclusion come amalgamated strategies. That recognition also supported that those Indigenous leaders made decisions about what to choose, adapt and apply given the experience that they encountered.

**Adopting.** Much of what the participants identified as strategies effective in their professional practice were associated with the professional and societal context that they

found themselves in. When negotiating at boardroom tables in Ottawa, the tool for the job was what was familiar and required within that context. That Indigenous educational leaders achieved success by replicating what the mainstream employed in their practice, though, undervalues the ability of Indigenous educational leaders to employ strategies consistent with the mainstream but nuanced by application to an Indigenous context. Adoption of mainstream strategies spoke to the capacity of those individuals. Their core capacity, as well as their capacity to acquire knowledge and skills, contributed to a profile of success resulting from the experience of Indigenous educational leadership.

Attention to the complexities of adopting skills familiar in a mainstream context began to abstract that pursuit from individual practice to a community of practice. Typical communities of practice in educational leadership identify challenges, opportunities and strategies. Challenges, opportunities and strategies for Indigenous educational leaders are defined in context and need to be assessed in context to be able to shift the focus from what Indigenous educational leaders need to learn to do by looking outside of themselves to what they can do by looking within. Externally imposed practices impart a perception of deficit and acquisition while the ability to adopt the tool commensurate with the task is a liberating act. The ability to reflect on and learn from the assumption of new knowledge and skills is an attribute that those leaders have seen value in and so they pick it up and place it in their bundles.

**Enlisting.** Those strategies that are influenced by family or community influence must be recognized, celebrated and normalized in order to be moved to scale. Those are often subtle and sometimes overt skills that came to the participants through modeling and direct teachings. Enlisting strategies that carry the influence of family and

community has the dual potential of endorsing known and effective skills and transmitting those skills to future generations. Young-Leon (2012) identifies that, "Many of the Elders agreed that to serve the community is a gift and a responsibility. To transmit Indigenous knowledge and culturally relevant leadership skills, Indigenous communities must focus on building community through intergenerational learning" (p. 57).

While the participants revealed comparatively few strategies that overtly claimed a foundation in Indigenous heritage, it was important to refer to the broad definition of heritage that predicted, by virtue of their Indigenous identity, that their influence was as legitimately an Indigenous influence as that which revealed traditional practices, beliefs and values. As Collins (2010), querying Polanyi, revealed, "If 'all knowledge is either tacit or rooted in tacit knowledge,' the explicit seems to be parasitical on the tacit – which it is to the extent that the explicit is without significance in the absence of the tacit" (p. 7). That perspective endorsed that the participants revealed nuances of their being as an Indigenous community member as they entered and acted within a context of leadership.

Fostering opportunity for Indigenous educational leaders to practice, think and write in educational leadership would continue to reveal those nuances and contribute to a critical Indigenous educational leadership discourse. That discourse, replete with diverse influences and able to contribute to enhanced practice through an amalgam of Indigenous and non-Indigenous leadership practices useful in contemporary educational settings, would advantage Indigenous participation in educational leadership. Their Indigenous influence was not so much lying by the trail as it was in a pocket, employed

less in situations of educational leadership than it could have been. With that instigation, it shifts from that pocket into the bundle for more deliberate use.

**Adapting.** As was anticipated in the thesis of this work, much of what Indigenous educational leaders applied in practice was innovated. That reality may be influenced by a number of factors, including that Indigenous educational leaders may not typically come through the same trajectory of organizational leadership as non-Indigenous leaders. Simply, they may not have had the same opportunity of models in organizational management or development, resulting in the need to learn and exercise the profession on a compressed timeline. Further, most leadership and organizational strategies are not engineered for effectiveness in a colonized environment. That is evidenced in the fact that mainstream education has largely not yet been able to significantly enhance Indigenous student learning outcomes. These leaders exercised their professional practice in the most trying of contexts often without the availability of adequate resources. Their ability to adapt was remarkable considering not only an ambivalent view of their work, but also an often-hostile environment of influence. Still, their responses were diverse as “...Indigenous leaders are expected to lead change in the community that not only meets current needs, but anticipates the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead” (Voyageur, Brearley & Calliou, 2014, p. 11).

Instigating dialogue pertaining to innovation does more than celebrate ingenuity. It is a claim of ownership that reduces the notion of binary cultures staking claims in discreet contexts of influence. Indigenous participation in Western education is not only a product of coercion. There is a voluntary, necessary and circumstantial aspect to Indigenous participation in Western education that endorses participation and

contribution. Celebrating adaptive use recognizes the currency of Indigenous participation. Adaptation is a large and somewhat recognizable piece lying squarely in the path that is put into the bundle.

The decolonizing leadership heuristic causes Indigenous educational leadership to engage multidisciplinary. Leaders might inquire as to their self and group influences in assembling a professional leadership toolkit. Just as this study has embraced a multidisciplinary approach, it subsumes the same into practice. The leader establishes a position based on their eclectic heritage. Effective leadership establishes a consistent foundation for decision-making, preferably one authentically rooted to the leader. An appreciative Indigenous analysis of leadership position is a great asset to Indigenous educational leadership and is a tangible product of the heuristic.

### **Indigenous Leadership as an Act of Consciousness**

Adoption of a transformational paradigm is commensurate with the goals and ideals of heuristic research. Experience as a source of meaning maintains focus and avoids the imposition of meaning by disassociated theory and social context. The problem is that recognition of the validity of context and experience is difficult to recognize without an established vantage point from which to witness the practice of Indigenous educational leadership. As Indigenous educational leaders come to value their contributions, not only does their practice improve but also the practice is normalized. Situating a decolonizing leadership heuristic among the litany of reflective tools for enhanced educational leadership practice has the potential to bring radical change to the nature of the discourse.



The deliberateness of being and acting in response to that which is encountered fosters ownership of experience. While each individual encounter with the phenomenon is discreet, each is also a part of a continuum of experience that counters hegemonic practices that diminish by isolation. A most useful paradigm of Indigenous educational leadership is an understanding of context, as illustrated by Archibald (2008):

...Graham Smith (2000), ... challenges us to examine the political struggles inherent in the educational sites where Western and Indigenous education meet. He emphasizes achieving an Indigenous consciousness-raising process that does not dwell on the colonizers but focuses on how Indigenous thought and action become transformative, thereby serving to improve Indigenous living conditions. (p. 89-90)

The challenge of a consciousness raising process is that much of what needs to come into focus is not a technical challenge and response but an emotional one. The participants' most compelling contributions resulted from acting on love. They expressed deep love and commitment for their families, communities and generations yet to come.

The decolonizing leadership heuristic is limited if it contributes only to a cognitive assessment of the experience of being an Indigenous educational leader. The heuristic emerged through a storied tour of the phenomenon of interest and it is to be applied to a storied analysis of experience. Seeing with your heart is not about yielding to a rational leadership paradigm but is analytical, it is professional and it can be a significant influence on building professional capacity and contributing to improved student learning outcomes for Indigenous students. Frank (2010) said, "Stories animate human life; that is their work. Stories work with people, for people, and always stories work on people, affecting what people are able to see as real, as possible, and is worth doing or best avoided" (p. 3). Extending the narrative of place, participation and achievements helps Indigenous leadership to adopt a narrative of capacity. Frank (2010)

noted, "Stories breathe life not only into individuals, but also into groups that assemble around telling and believing certain stories. After stories animate, they instigate" (p. 3).

As a vortex is a more dynamic representation of the circle of life than a static shape, I employed it in demonstrating the trajectory from recognition of one's context, to introspection, to claiming the tacit in raising one's consciousness of place and effect in Indigenous educational leadership. The currency that constitutes the through-line is narrative. Indigenous educational leaders must start with recognition that "stories work to emplot lives: they offer a thought that makes some particular future not only plausible but also compelling" (Frank, 2010, p. 10). The heuristic can be a useful reflective tool in fostering an enhanced discourse and practice of Indigenous educational leadership.

### **A Raised Consciousness Medicine Bundle**

Most cultures possess tangible tools of healing that range from technical medical tools to medicinal substances to sacred objects. The North American Indigenous tradition of the medicine bundle is a sacred toolkit of sorts for medicines and sacred objects. The analogy lends itself to the practice of Indigenous leadership self-assessment in decolonizing environment in the manner that Episkenew (2009) noted, "...Indigenous literature functions as 'medicine' to help cure the colonial contagion by healing the communities... It accomplishes this by challenging the 'master narrative'..." (p. 2). The notion of protections inherent in medicines in a traditional Indigenous sense is akin to wellness through confidence and, in opposition, illness through doubt. The linking of confidence and wellness and doubt and illness is commonplace and embedded in traditional and modern wellness paradigms alike.

The utility of a decolonizing leadership heuristic in connecting a positive consciousness with wellness and effectiveness is that it links to appreciative elements of being rather than an externalized effectiveness matrix. The medicine bundle has meaning to its keeper. The decolonizing heuristic precipitates consciousness of experience interacting with the world. Smith, Flowers & Larkin (2009) stated:

...in phenomenological terms, experience or consciousness is always consciousness of something – seeing is seeing of something, remembering is remembering of something, judging is judging of something. That something – the object of which we are conscious – may have been stimulated by a perception of a ‘real’ object in the world, or through an act of memory or imagination. Thus, there is an intentional relationship between the car and my awareness of it. (p. 13)

The leader need only be shown pathways to seeing, remembering or judging. They retain ownership of experience and interpretation. The model motivates the capacity of individuals by reintroducing agency through sending colonization to the background via bracketing and bringing a legitimized Indigenous experience to the foreground.

Indigenous thought, ideas and motivations, even when they arise from a colonized experience, don’t answer to an imposed conceptualization of Indigenous experience but to real lives associated with real experiences. Even the purpose for which an act is undertaken matters and only the person can bring that knowledge to bear. To provide Indigenous educational leaders with better tools of appraising effectiveness of actions, best practices, strategies and theories, they need to be measured against aspirations and ideals of Indigenous communities. This notion was captured by Dion (2009) who said, “With this (re)membering comes an overwhelming sense of loss, in that so much of the indigenous contribution has been lost in the violence of colonization, and much of what survived is unrecognized in legitimate histories” (p. 18). Dion captured the complexity of measuring success in a contested environment. Deliberate inventories of Indigenous

contributions informed by experience will help Indigenous educational leaders build on an Indigenous litany of success and begin the long journey of demonstrating that a turn to Indigenous theory and practice is likely the best and most efficient approach to success that continues to evade Western education.

A raised consciousness medicine bundle is not prescriptive, then, but permissive. It invites Indigenous educational leaders to locate themselves by place and kinship and state their mission (agency and autonomy). Leaders are invited to declare their competencies for the journey and relate their exploits (confidence and effectiveness). They then demonstrate that they have acquired the requisite knowledge and skills for the task at hand (adopting, enlisting, adapting).

Ultimately, the heuristic offers more of a reflection of oneself in the water than a clinical analysis. Who the person sees will have as much to do with how they are feeling about themselves and what conditions are influencing them as the clarity and stillness of the water. The reflection is a reversed likeness rather than a copy. The copy only mocks a likeness where the reflection imposed on by environmental conditions provides substance for interpretation. Just as Episknew (2009) stated that "...all of us must...by necessity, craft our own personal myths to enable us to interpret and understand our lives" (p. 69) and that those myths are sacred stories that represent our personal truths, the decolonizing heuristic encourages naming the phenomenon to establish a context within which to talk about influences, experiences and interpretations and to chart a course forward based on all of the relevant factors that contribute to one knowing when to let the bowstring go and launch the arrow forward with intent.

## **Raised Consciousness and the Duty to Consult**

As the genesis of this research was in the Duty to Consult, it warrants revisiting informed by the decolonizing leadership heuristic. Motivation in the Duty to Consult risks giving too much credit to the Canadian courts. As the ruling affords opportunity to Indigenous peoples in Canada, we are not defined by what the courts recognize. As at the outset of this study, the Duty to Consult was more a call to wake to opportunity rather than sleep to defeat. This orientation is consistent with Henderson's (2006) belief that "As First Nations jurisprudence is not derived from Eurocentric discourses, it challenges the imported legal heritage and practices" (Henderson, p. 119). Employing an opportunity realized in the courts in re-commissioning a word warrior class (Turner, 2008) is advantageous.

Newman's (2014) revisiting of the Duty to Consult assesses the Canadian Indigenous legal landscape after more than ten years of influence of the Duty to Consult. While there is much more legal interpretation of the ruling, the force of the ruling remains in effect. Some of the general reflection gleaned from Newman's updates analysis is that the Duty to Consult has remained durable and is part of a larger commission of reconciliation in Canadian law and political relations with Indigenous peoples. To the extent that the Duty to Consult helped to raise consciousness or resulted from raised consciousness as it relates to Indigenous issues is debatable. Still, as the Crown practices acting with honour, the question remains how we will rise up to meet the hand extended with honour.

Where the decolonizing leadership heuristic might contribute to an environment characterized by the Duty to Consult is threefold. It populates a space of rallying

confidence, characterizes how Indigenous leaders act as a result and precipitates different outcomes. The decolonizing leadership heuristic is a small voice born of and contributing to conscientization among Indigenous peoples. Newman (2014) illustrates that the Duty to Consult is precipitating an attitude of honourable interactions where governments and corporations are developing evermore refined frameworks to guide consultation and Indigenous communities and organizations are developing more sophisticated ways to advocate for and respond to enhanced consultation. Indigenous educational and community leaders can be a critical catalyst to broker the players as they can model and teach informed assertiveness. Indian Control of Indian Education caused the school to be a bridge from tradition to participation in a contemporary and mixed environment. The educational leader buoyed by renewed agency can now serve to populate that space with promise.

### **Implications for Indigenous Educational Leadership**

Indigenous educational leaders are practicing within a context that warrants their contribution more than ever. Closing the outcomes gap for Indigenous students has become a nation-wide imperative. Systems, both provincial and First Nations, are looking for answers that will contribute to solutions. While funding and economies of scale are issues that are being slowly addressed through policy and legislative remedies, it is in schools that real gains will be realized. In Canada, the Martin Aboriginal Education Initiative has developed and is piloting a First Nations principals' course to build the capacity of First Nations principals in community and instructional leadership. Given the solution-oriented environment in Indigenous education, it is timely to look to Indigenous

educational leaders to contribute to and lead dialogue and action in Indigenous leadership and improvement.

### **Implications for Practice**

**Collective Voice.** The education sector is predicated upon collaboration more than ever before. The underlying assumption is not only that ideas are mobilized within the context of a learning community, but also collaboration adds value by leveraging capacity that inheres within the learning community. Of the many educational leadership forums in Canada, the participation of Indigenous leaders is cursory at best. Because of the inability of most jurisdictions to achieve Indigenous representation in leadership, those forums are rendered ineffective for robust Indigenous leadership collaboration and exchange.

Greater professional collaboration among Indigenous educational leaders would create opportunity for a leadership exchange based on practice that would add value to academic discourse. Indigenous educational leaders could look to regional, provincial, tribal or national opportunities to gather for professional exchange and advocacy. Those forums could contribute to professional mentorships and opportunities to discern and articulate the skills and knowledge of Indigenous educational leaders, challenging isolation and celebrating capacity. Through collective action, they could begin to exert pressure on communities and governments for the policy and legislative changes that would have a positive influence on Indigenous education in Canada. By working together across jurisdictions, they would have the potential to demonstrate effective practices and influence the plethora of research and reports on the topic. The

decolonizing leadership heuristic could offer a point for a robust discourse on Indigenous educational leadership of practice.

**Action Research.** The skills and knowledge that Indigenous educational leaders have developed within the context of their practice could achieve greater profile and influence through action research. Action research creates a context of inquiry close to the source of the curiosity. That has the potential to weave the knowledge and skills of Indigenous leaders into the inquiry unencumbered by the dearth of literature profiling the unique and associated contributions of Indigenous leaders. They need not rely on a well-evidenced discourse to value the contributions of their resistance and inventive capacity. Action research instigates local inquiry based on local priorities but has the potential to trickle up to influence more broad discourse. Such inquiries have the threefold advantage of profiling local instructional and organizational leadership initiatives, providing a platform to identify and profile leadership practices within a familiar context of influence and enhancing the contribution and qualification of Indigenous leaders. As Indigenous leaders become accustomed to critically examining and learning from their practice, their unique influences also gather profile and influence. The decolonizing leadership heuristic may instigate inquiry that could be built upon as a body of Indigenous educational leadership practice emerges, precipitating better and more informed reflective tools.

### **Implications for Policy**

**Enhanced Qualifications.** With enhanced academic and professional qualifications comes greater influence on professional discourse and practice. As Indigenous educational leaders acquire greater qualifications, they have more potential to



influence leadership discourse and profile their unique contributions and take their place among educational policy developers in Canada. In the early 2000's, New Zealand set a goal of achieving five hundred Maori Ph.D.'s. That goal was exceeded ahead of schedule. Canada needs a bold target to have Indigenous leadership not only in the universities, but also in provincial ministries, school districts and tribal authorities. Enhanced academic standing would promote research on the practice of Indigenous education. The irony is that it takes a critical mass of Indigenous leaders with advanced qualifications to advocate for the kinds of policies that results in more supports to achieve greater Indigenous participation in higher learning and qualifications. The decolonizing leadership heuristic may serve as a rallying point for Indigenous educational leaders to see the potential in populating influence to shape the education sector in advantage to Indigenous students and communities.

**Leadership Pathways.** Educational leadership often traverses a familiar pathway from school principal to district leader to educational policy maker at the tribal, regional, provincial or territorial level. Affirmation at each level is measured against matrices of characteristics of success that have been largely developed in the mainstream. That fact builds biases into the many steps that facilitate a leadership trajectory. Recognition of the unique challenges and contributions of Indigenous educational leaders should contribute to the development of policy driven stepping-stones to foster Indigenous advancement to senior policy development positions. Recognition of cultural competencies within leadership matrices at each step in the continuum would foster Indigenous participation and advancement. The decolonizing leadership heuristic could serve as a model for all jurisdictions to consider Indigenous experience in identifying leadership competencies.

Boards of education, tribal authorities and principal, director or superintendent associations could all contribute to affirming the practice of Indigenous educational leadership by developing policy to account for recognition of associated skills and knowledge in selection and advancement processes.

### **Implications for Theory**

**Reclaiming Practice.** Indigenous academics have contributed to a vibrant discourse that has strongly situated Indigenous knowledge in epistemological and pedagogical literature. Less is known about how Indigenous knowledge and experience influences the practice of educational leadership. Adaptability and innovation are important currencies in contemporary educational leadership. Indigenous leaders would benefit from discourse that moves from identifying the problem to proposing solutions. On a broader scale, Canadian educational leadership theory would benefit from a focus on the contributions of those qualities to educational leadership. Student diversity and the associated learning outcome gap, representation of sub-constituencies or advancing local or regional priorities within a larger educational policy context are examples of contemporary educational issues where the practice of Indigenous educational leadership would add value. The decolonizing leadership heuristic could highlight the need to honour the presence of Indigenous theory and extrapolate how the theoretical foundation can contribute to an Indigenous leadership discourse of practice.

**Bridge Theory.** Zuckerman's (2008) notion of a bridge figure is one who has lived in two cultural contexts and endeavours to share the richness of each with the other. Enlivening discourse on the influence of the positive attributes of Western and Indigenous educational leadership theory goes beyond celebrating each to discerning

what is new and different at the point of convergence. As the bricolage instigates a theoretical look at innovating from fragments, theory that bridges Western and Indigenous leadership practice defines a space characterized by colonization and decolonization while contributing to a foundation of appreciation and hope. The decolonizing leadership heuristic could serve as a theoretical point of departure for study into sense-making and forward planning not dependent on resolution of colonization but able to benefit from decolonizing discourse.

**Trickster Bricolage and Agentic Theory.** Both the spiritual-cultural and literary traditions of the Trickster offer a pathway to liberating theory. Given the dire need for engaged and effective Indigenous leadership to capitalize on opportunity to renew the relationship with Canada, advancing Indigenous leadership theory that precipitates agency is critical. The Trickster represents a valid and familiar epistemology of discovery while ensuring that humility prevails, as there is always a catch. The decolonizing leadership heuristic can support educational leadership to benefit from a pause in the cycle of colonization to examine what has been acquired along the journey. Indigenous research that brackets, “...or put[s] to one side, the taken-for-granted world in order to concentrate on our perception of that world” (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p. 13) offers liberating theory than can advance from narratives of subordination.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

While this research required personal depth and commitment from the researcher and research participants, it mostly framed a discourse of appreciation and agency. It served, though, as a gateway to research that exploits the entry point to pose specific questions that furthers understanding and opportunity associated with Indigenous

educational leadership. From that platform, future research could shine a light on the effects of *scrounging genius* on community engagement, curriculum development or leadership development.

The challenge of engaging Indigenous community in education, given the genocidal use of Western education against Indigenous peoples, would yield rich insight. As Indigenous leaders carved out a space in the education sector, they served as catalysts to Indigenous community resilience and transformation of the sector. These leaders also worked to sustain Indigenous culture and language within the context of curriculum. The modes of instructional innovation as well as the educational resources that emerged from a relegated space would constitute a valuable inquiry. Lastly, the leaders that blazed trail in Indigenous education would have undoubtedly had an influence on their peers and protégés. It would be interesting to initiate similar research with participants across the spectrum of experience to witness the effects and developments over time and across varying contexts.

### **Researchers Reflections**

The aspect that I am most satisfied with as I look back on this protracted research endeavour is that I was able to remain as committed to shining a light on the genius that flowed from work on the margins as the day that I was inspired with the idea. My necessary immersion in the confluence of phenomenology, the bricolage, heuristic research and Indigenous knowledge and methodologies was a difficult discourse to extract myself from. There is much more meaning that inheres in that gathering point than I was able to extract at this point. Still, the inspiration that was yielded from that self-dialogue was important for me. It is also an area of study that I plan to return to as I

believe there is as much to be learned from an Indigenous perspective about our time and journey from contact to the present as there is from the genesis of our being on Turtle Island to the time of contact. It is challenging to propose use of any Western theory to make sense of Indigenous experience. It trivializes valuable criticism of the danger of using Western tools in Indigenous inquiry to put the pen, technology or the English language on the same plane as German Idealism, for example. I find no need to settle the dispute because I believe that cautions not to get caught up in someone else's cultural discourse at the expense of our own are as valuable a dialogue as the need to capitalize on our adaptability.

My second reflective insight is that heuristic research remains, for me, a stellar tool in the endeavour of meaning making, especially where theoretical imperialism is an ever-present concern. The method and methodological alignment of heuristic research provided an anti-structure for this research. The ability to imagine and invent so close to the evidence of the participants balanced an unfettered inquiry with a commitment to validity. From the moment that I read the first essence of experience that resulted from a heuristic study I was moved by the skillful use of language and process to draw meaning from experience vertically (within the individual) and horizontally (across the population). That seemed so very natural to me as I imagined that mothers who had lost an only child, survivors of abuse or young adults with a life-limiting illness might appreciate dialogue on a kindred experience.

Thirdly, I reflect on the tension that characterized this research as a result of shining a light on a contested space. There is risk in presenting a conflicted voice in research as the reader may fail to find resolution in experiencing the research. My aim

was to honour a contested narrative by refusing to take the edge off the sting of colonization while achieving resolution in contributing a positive attribute to the discourse of Indigenous educational leadership. One of the most difficult heuristic studies to read was Cockrum-Murphy's (2010) *Stronger at the Broken Places*, subtitled *Growing Up in Chaos and the Journey from Suffering to self-Actualization*. The sub title well captures the tumultuous journey of the study. The tension is only relieved in celebrating the author's realization of better life circumstance.

The tension inherent in accounts of colonized experience could have been problematic if not for mediating tensions by learning from them. Trickster provocation to confront experience does not make the participants contested but places them within a contested space. Fish (2004) emphasizes the role of interpretive communities in creating authentic meaning rather than the variable interpretations of individuals immersed in the same text. The participants as an interpretive community elevate meaning beyond individual acts of hurt and resistance. It is not only the stories of oppression and resistance that exude tension but the act of resistance research that surfaces tensions. Kincheloe & Berry (2004) note that:

The incongruities between ...cultural modes of inquiry are quite valuable, for within the tensions of difference rests insights into multiple dimensions of the research act – insights that move us to new levels of understanding of the subjects, purposes, and nature of inquiry. (p. 16)

The research voice oscillated between capturing the intent of the interpretive community and maintaining a voice of malcontent and resolve where that malcontent and resolve is seen as an exercise of the capacity built by and on behalf of the community. The tensions of the context are necessary fodder for analyzing decolonization. Kincheloe and Berry (2004) identified that “the ability to trace the footprints of power in the

research domain is a central dimension of the bricoleur's efforts to understand complexity and knowledge production" (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004, p. 29). My task was not to resolve tension but to invite the reader into ideas and insights useful in making sense of the phenomenon of interest. As "...Bricoleurs contend that diverse and conflicting perspectives can be viewed as a resource" (Kincheloe & Berry, p. 47), it is the resource of contest that marks the bricolage as a useful orientation in an effort to assert the validity of experience from the margins.

Mostly, I look back on this experience and I marvel at how much trust I had in the themes that emerged from analysis of the data. The themes were not born easily. Still, when my thinking and writing spawned a theme, I took the opportunity to live with the theme and test it to the extent that when I was able to use one theme to bridge to another, I always felt I was advancing from my trailing foot solidly on one stepping stone to my leading foot solidly on another. The interpretive task was fraught with risk and imperfection. The risk was that in stepping away from a more typical narrowing in qualitative research based on frequency to meaning making that relies on the equivalent of scientific divining. Imperfection, I believe, is the calling card of heuristic research. Imperfection resides in the overly fleeting nature of essences, the fragility of conclusions when the researcher's vantage point is critical in arriving at interpretations and the reliance on intuition.

Appraising value in research that seems so selfish for the researcher is difficult. It is audacious to believe that my journey mattered to anyone else. I offer, though, that the participants' journeys are what matter most and that they have, unassumingly, instigated a movement of voice, identity and innovation. For all those who are also part of a calling

to remarkable liberation, and all of those that aspire to be, this research might serve some minute purpose and for that I am grateful to have embarked on the journey as the destination is inconsequential but the pathway will never be forgotten. I now spend so much more time reading the pathway that I'm confident that I know where I am.

### **Conclusion**

Indigenous educational leadership is an imaginative exercise. The onslaught of Western theory and practice has left Indigenous epistemological and pedagogical practices reeling. Indigenous educational leaders reside in the gap between what dominant systems promote and what has worked in Indigenous communities for millennia. Imagining the possibility of a repatriated Indigenous education requires that leaders gather what they have at their disposal, refashion a vision of success and engineer a way forward. While that seems like a tall order, it has the potential to inspire hope and ownership in what Indigenous leaders are doing anyways. Imagination reframes a problem into an opportunity.

The Indigenous educational leaders who contributed their voices to this research have helped to set the stage for a resurgence of Indigenous participation and voice in Indigenous education. By modeling resilience and the ability to invoke change in Indigenous and mainstream education, their stories serve as a heuristic useful in self-discovery so that others may benefit from their strength and compassion and, in turn, model the same for others yet to come.



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## **APPENDICES**

## Appendix 1 – Behavioural Research Ethics Board Application

### University of Saskatchewan

### Behavioural Research Ethics Board

#### APPLICATION FOR APPROVAL OF RESEARCH PROTOCOL

**1. Supervisor:** Dr. Sheila Carr-Stewart, Department of Educational Administration

**1a. Student:** Gordon A. Martell, Ph.D. Candidate, Department of Educational Administration, College of Education

**1b. Research Phase Start Date:** January, 2012

**Research Phase Completion Date:** December, 2012

**2. Title of Study:** No Sharp Dealings: A Heuristic Study of Experiences with the Phenomenon of Advising the Colonizer

**3. Abstract:** Motivated by the *duty to consult* (*Haida Nation v. British Columbia*, 2004), this research invites Aboriginal educational leaders to describe their experience consulting government for the purposes of educational policy development. The duty to consult introduces a new era where the Canadian courts will play an increasing role in defining *existing Aboriginal and treaty rights* (Newman, 2009). My research interest is in motivating Aboriginal educational leaders to examine their potential to affect positive change in Aboriginal education policy by laying claim to the strategies that they have developed while engaged in consultation *from the margins*. This claiming exercise looks for the pragmatic inventiveness of the *bricoleur* (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004) in examining *what we have available to us* and *what we choose to do with it*. I employ heuristic research methods to elicit reflection and self-discovery of the pragmatic and problem-solving nature of participation in consultation. Specifically, I ask the research participants to (a) describe their experiences participating in consultation for the purpose of developing policy in Aboriginal education and (b) to describe the strategies and knowledge that they have developed in pursuing their objectives in consultation. The product of this research is a potentially liberating vision of experience useful in fostering more productive policy contributions and in *Taking Back Our Spirits* (Episkenew, 2009) in research, epistemology and educational practice.

**4. Funding:** n/a

**5. Expertise:** Working with an Aboriginal population requires familiarity with issues and protocols. I am a First Nations person and I have been working in First Nations and Metis education locally, provincially and nationally for the past twenty years. I work in education and community development where I advocate for advancements in educational outcomes for Aboriginal students and increased access to wellness services, affordable housing, quality childcare, food security and links to employment. My 1998 Masters' thesis, entitled, *A Case Study of the Ethical Dilemmas Experienced by Aboriginal Educators*, emphasized respectful protocols for working with Traditional

Indigenous Knowledge. Further, the reason for the adoption of a heuristic research methodology is to validate my role in sharing experience and interest with the research participants. In this instance, I am also an Aboriginal educational leader. Our potentially shared experiences and interests promote sensitivity to the research participants and heightened awareness of potential risk factors. Heuristic research methodology also fosters diverse modes of expression, ensuring that opportunity for Aboriginal experience and interpretation is provided and that non-Aboriginal paradigms are not forced upon Aboriginal contributions.

**6. Conflict of Interest:** n/a

**7. Participants:** Purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2007) will be employed to ensure that potential participants have direct experience with the phenomenon of interest. The criteria for approaching a potential research participant include that the individual (a) self-identifies as Aboriginal, (b) is or has been, in the last five years, an educational leader (director of education or superintendent in a provincial school board or a tribal council educational authority and (c) has engaged in consultation with the Provincial Ministry of Education for the purposes of educational policy development. I intend to begin with a personal letter of invitation (Appendix A) that I will mail to the population that I am aware of and have access to. I will personally visit those who choose to contact me by telephone or e-mail, voluntarily expressing an interest in learning more about the study. During this initial visit, our conversation will be guided by the outline that appears in Appendix B. I will also ask all of the potential research participants for recommendations of others that might also fit the criteria. This cycle of invitation, dialogue, and exploring new contacts will continue until I have three research participants identified.

**7a. Sample Recruitment Material:** The only recruitment tool is the Participant Invitation (Appendix A) that I will send to the potential research participants.

**8. Consent:** I will meet with potential research participants who contact me and express an interest in learning more about the study. I will then share the purpose and intent of the study. I will provide a participation consent form (Appendix C) that explains their rights as participants. I will explain to the potential research participants that they may either accept to participate at that time by signing the participant consent form or make a decision following the initial meeting with me. I will request that they contact me within ten days or I will make a follow-up call to secure a response and facilitate their signing of the consent form should they agree to be involved in the research. For those that do consent to participate in the research, they will be reminded of their right to withdraw from the research at the end of each of the three interviews and up to the time of their signing the transcript release.

**9. Methods/Procedures:** Fostering dialogue with the research participants is the primary source of data collection. I will provide the research-participants with an interview schedule (Appendix D) prior to our meeting. Moustakas (1990) states that in heuristic research, "a typical way of gathering material is through interviews that often take the

form of dialogues with...one's research participants" (p. 39). It is in these dialogues that, "...one is encouraged to permit ideas, thoughts, feelings, and images to unfold and be expressed naturally" (Moustakas, p. 39). This warrants an open-ended interview schedule. The conversations will be tape recorded for later transcription. The research-participants are invited to participate in a minimum of three dialogue sessions. There may be additional meetings, depending on whether the research-participants have had, "...an opportunity to tell one's story to a point of natural closing" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 39). The second scheduled interview will attend to research-participant validation while the third scheduled meeting will invite research-participant feedback on the initial analyses and creative synthesis of the aggregate findings represented in the study themes.

**10. Storage of Data:** All tapes, transcripts and interview notes will be stored in a locked cabinet in my home at 711 Beechmont Lane, Saskatoon, SK, S7V 1C9, and in password protected computer files on a computer that only I have access to. Upon completion of the study, Dr. Carr-Stewart, Department of Educational Administration, will assume responsibility for data storage for five years.

**11. Dissemination of Results:** The primary purpose of this research is to identify community capacity and return that capacity for the benefit of the Aboriginal community. The research participants will be extensively involved in the research throughout the process by virtue of being involved in contributing to, refining and validating their contributions to the questions, the synthesis of their contributions and the aggregate statement representing the contributions of all of the participants. The primary mode of disseminating the research results will be through the publication of my dissertation for the purpose of completing my Ph.D. Further, I intend to workshop the findings of the study with each research participant. The workshop will summarize the research and engage in dialogue regarding the research results and implications of the research. The intent is to ensure the research participants are as conversant with the research design, processes, findings, interpretations and implications as I am. This knowledge transfer exercise will provide the research participants an opportunity to acquire a level of comfort and ownership with the research results that will allow them to further motivate others to explore their potential to use the experience in their own growth. Further, the research participants will be invited to co-author a scholarly paper to be delivered at a minimum of one public forum and in one written publication. I intend to pursue other conference presentations and write other scholarly papers as opportunity arises.

**12. Risk, Benefits, and Deception:** There is minimal risk of exposure of the identity of the research participants due to the small population that fit the participant criteria. This is accounted for in the confidentiality provisions. The benefit to being involved in this study is that the participants have the opportunity to explore their experience contributing to educational policy development and participate in producing an appreciative look at their aggregate experiences. The benefit also potentially extends to other Aboriginal educational leaders who might also be consulted for the purposes of policy development. There is no deception associated with this research.

**13. Confidentiality:** Direct quotations and aggregate data will be used in the dissertation. As the focus is on the participant experience participating in policy development, any reference to specific policies, processes or institutions will be removed. The relatively small population warrants that I send participant invitations directly to individuals rather than making invitation through the institutions in which they currently work. This fosters the protection of confidentiality as potential participants could be concerned that their employer may be able to identify them in the research given the small number of research participants. I can more effectively work with the research participant to remove potentially identifying information but once an organization knows that one of their senior leaders has been invited for this study, it would be more difficult to protect confidentiality. Given that potential participants hold leadership positions, have graduate degrees and would likely identify as my peer, it is warranted to approach them directly. The nature of the knowledge sought warrants personal and informed consent rather than that of their community or employer. Participants will be assigned a pseudonym in reporting the data. Research participants will have opportunity to review all of the transcripts, interpretations and conclusions to ensure that any identifiable characteristics are removed.

**14. Data/Transcript Release:** Participants will be given the opportunity to withdraw responses following their interview and up to the time that they sign the transcript release. Participants will review final transcripts and sign a transcript release acknowledging that the transcript accurately reflects what they said or intended to say. Participants will also have an opportunity to review the quotations that will appear in written and oral presentations of the research and grant permission to the researcher to use those quotations. The Data/Transcript Release appears in Appendix E.

**15. Debriefing and Feedback:** Upon completion of the study, the research participants will be provided an opportunity to participate in a session aimed at providing them with a detailed overview of the intent, process, findings and knowledge transfer plans. The research participants will also be given a copy of the dissertation upon completion.

**16. Required Signatures:**

Researcher: \_\_\_\_\_

Supervisor: \_\_\_\_\_

Department Head: \_\_\_\_\_

**17. Required Contact Information:**

Gordon A. Martell, Ph.D. Candidate  
Department of Educational Administration  
711 Beechmont Lane  
Saskatoon, SK S7V 1C9  
Phone: (306) 659-7126

Fax: (306) 659-2010  
E-mail: [gmartell@gscs.sk.ca](mailto:gmartell@gscs.sk.ca)

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E-mail: [Sheila.Carr-Stewart@usask.ca](mailto:Sheila.Carr-Stewart@usask.ca)

## Appendix 2 – Initial Visit Discussion Guide

1. Thank you for agreeing to meet with me and learn more about this study.
2. I will ask the potential participant about themselves, where they are from, their work experience and their interests.
3. I will provide a brief history of my life experiences, my work, my academic interests and what this research means to me.
4. This study is potentially important because it:
  - a. Examines the nature of consultation at a time when more importance is being placed on consultation.
  - b. Endeavours to lay claims to the experiences of Aboriginal educational leaders by describing the strategies that have been developed to be effective in consultation.
  - c. Aims to motivate our peers to recognize their own potential in consultation.
5. The approach that I am employing in this study is:
  - a. That we are in a pivotal era where the importance of consultation with Aboriginal peoples has been recognized by the courts.
  - b. That in the spirit of the *bricolage*, I intend to focus on the positive aspects of your experiences with consultation. I intend to look at how Aboriginal educational leaders used what was available to them in new and inventive ways to maximize their influence and contribution.
  - c. That the use of heuristic research methods validates your experiences with consultation and relies on your insights and intuitions and questions about the experience.
6. If you should choose to participate in this research, you can expect:
  - a. That I will do everything that I can to protect your anonymity and that I will include you in this process by asking you to review transcripts, my interpretations of what you said and quotations that I intend to use to ensure that your anonymity is protected.
  - b. That I will arrange to meet with you at least three times for approximately two hours each between January and December, 2012.
  - c. That I will use general questions to encourage dialogue and that I will explore your experiences with consultation and what thoughts and feelings are associated with the consultative experience.
7. Do you have any questions or concerns?

### Appendix 3 – Research Participant Letter of Introduction

Gordon A. Martell  
711 Beechmont Lane  
Saskatoon, SK  
S7V 1C9

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Dear \_\_\_\_\_;

Please accept this invitation to participate in my research study for the purposes of completing my Ph.D., entitled, *No Sharp Dealings: A Heuristic Study of Experiences with the Phenomenon of Advising the Colonizer*. This study has been approved by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board on April 2, 2012. The intent of this study is to examine the experiences of three Aboriginal educational leaders who have contributed to provincial policy development in Aboriginal education. I am interested in your experiences with this phenomenon and, more broadly, in what strategies you use to accomplish your goals in consulting for the purposes of policy development.

I am inviting research participants who 1) self-identify as an Aboriginal person; 2) are, or have been, an educational leader (director of education or superintendent in a provincial or band controlled educational authority, and; 3) have engaged in consultation with the Provincial Ministry of Education for the purposes of Aboriginal education policy development.

I am beginning with two broad questions:

- 1) Describe your experience participating in consultation for the purpose of developing policy in Aboriginal education.
- 2) What strategies and knowledge have you developed in pursuing your objectives in consultation?

From these questions, I intend to use open-ended questions and dialogue to collaboratively examine your experiences with consultation and the strategies that you employed to achieve your goals. I intend to record the interviews so that I can later transcribe them.

I would like to meet with you to tell you more about the importance of the study, how I intend to conduct the study and more about what you can expect if you should choose to participate in this research. I will also provide you an opportunity to ask me any questions. Meeting with me does not mean that you have agreed to participate in this research. If you should choose to participate, I would expect you to meet with me three times for approximately two hours each between January and December, 2012. Your role would be to share your experiences with me, check my interpretations of what you have said to ensure accuracy and to ensure that what I write does not breach your anonymity.

Thank you for considering participation in this study. If you are interested in learning more about this study, please contact me at 659-7126, 230-4070 or [gmartell@gscs.sk.ca](mailto:gmartell@gscs.sk.ca) within the next ten



days. If I do not hear from you within that timeline, I will call you to follow-up with your decision. Thank you for considering participation in this study.

Sincerely;

Gordon A. Martell

## **Appendix 4 - Participant Consent Form**

You are invited to participate in a research project entitled *No Sharp Dealings: A Heuristic Study of Experiences with the Phenomenon of Advising the Colonizer*. Please read this form carefully, and feel free to ask any questions that you might have.

**Researcher:** Gordon A. Martell  
Department of Educational Administration  
University of Saskatchewan  
Phone: (306) 659-7126

**Purpose and Procedure:** The intent of this study is to examine the experiences of three Aboriginal educational leaders who have contributed to provincial policy development in Aboriginal education. I am interested in your experiences with this phenomenon and, more broadly, in what strategies you use to accomplish your goals in consulting for the purposes of policy development. Participation in this study will entail at least three visits with me between January and December, 2012. Each visit will last approximately two hours. We will meet at an agreed upon time and place. During these meetings, we will explore your experiences contributing to Aboriginal educational policy in Saskatchewan. I will ask open ended questions to elicit responses. The data that I collect will be used in the writing of my Ph.D. dissertation. Aggregate data and direct quotations will be used. The data from this research project will also be published and presented at conferences; however, your identity will be kept confidential. Although I will report direct quotations from the interviews, you will be given a pseudonym, and all identifying information such as your name, your home community, where you work or which policy initiatives that you contributed to will not be reported. Upon completion of this study, I will offer you an opportunity to have me present the research and its findings to you. I will also provide you a copy of the completed dissertation.

### **Potential Benefits:**

Your participation in this study will allow me to complete my Ph.D. dissertation. Your participation will also help me to explore my interests in how Aboriginal educational leaders adopt and adapt what is available to them to make the most of their contributions to policy development. You will also potentially benefit by having an opportunity to explore your experiences and accomplishments in greater detail. Other possible benefits of this study include the opportunity to contribute to the development of a description of the ways in which Aboriginal educational leaders contribute to educational policy development in furthering the goals of their communities. Although there is no guarantee, this may, in turn, contribute to enhanced participation and more effective policy.

### **Potential Risks:**

There is minimal risk associated with this study that your anonymity may be breached. I will ensure that I do everything that I can to ensure that your anonymity is protected.

Specifically, you will be provided opportunity to review transcripts of your interview to ensure that any potentially revealing details are removed. Care will also be taken to ensure that you are not asked to share anything that you are not comfortable in sharing and that traditional family or community knowledge is not exploited. This will be accomplished by always offering you opportunities to review your interview transcripts, my interpretations of your contributions and any direct quotations that I use in the final report. You will be given the opportunity to add, alter, or delete information as you see fit. There is no deception associated with this research. Should you choose to withdraw from this study, you will be given an opportunity to do so after each interview and up to the time that you sign the transcript release. If you should choose to withdraw, all of your contributions and all records of these contributions will be destroyed.

### **Storage of Data:**

I will be recording interviews and later transcribing the interviews. At any time during the interview, you may request that I stop recording and that I only take notes at that time. I will provide you with the guiding questions prior to the interview. All tapes and transcripts will be securely locked in a file cabinet in my home and in password protected computer files. In addition, the research project results and associated material will be securely stored by Dr. Sheila Carr-Stewart at the University of Saskatchewan for a minimum of five years after the completion of the study. After this period the data will be destroyed. If you should choose to withdraw your participation, I will destroy all tapes and transcripts up to the time that you sign a transcript release form.

### **Confidentiality:**

All of your contributions to this research will be kept strictly confidential. You will be assigned a pseudonym. I will also ensure that I do not include any details in the final report that will give any clues as to your identity. You will also have an opportunity to review my writing to ensure that it accurately reflects what you said and that it does not reveal your identity.

### **Right to Withdraw:**

Your participation is voluntary, and you can answer only those questions that you are comfortable with. There is no guarantee that you will personally benefit from your involvement. The information that is shared will be held in strict confidence. You may withdraw from the research project for any reason, up to the time that you sign a transcript release, without penalty of any sort and this will not cause me or anyone else to be upset or angry with you and will not result in any type of penalty. If you withdraw from the research project, any data that you have contributed prior to the signing of the transcript release will be destroyed at your request.

**Questions:** If you have any questions concerning the research project, please feel free to ask at any point. You are also free to contact me anytime at 659-7126, 230-4070 or at [gmartell@gscs.sk.ca](mailto:gmartell@gscs.sk.ca). My research advisor, Dr. Sheila Carr-Stewart, can be reached at

966-7611 or at [Sheila.Carr-Stewart@usask.ca](mailto:Sheila.Carr-Stewart@usask.ca). This research project has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board on (insert date). Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to that committee through Mr. Curtis Chapman at the University of Saskatchewan Ethics Office (966-2084). Out of town participants may call collect.

**I have read and understood the description provided; I have had an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered. I consent to participate in the research project, understanding that I may withdraw my consent at any time. A copy of this Consent Form has been given to me for my records.**

---

(Name of Participant)

---

(Date)

---

(Signature of Participant)

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(Signature of Researcher)

## **Appendix 5 - Interview Schedule**

1. Please tell me a little about yourself:
  - a. Your home community and formative experiences.
  - b. Your education and professional experience.
  - c. Your general experiences offering your opinion and insights to policy development initiatives.
2. Describe your experience participating in consultation for the purpose of developing policy in Aboriginal education.
  - a. What people, events or contexts stand out for you when you consider a consultative experience?
  - b. What thoughts, feelings, ideas or questions come to mind when you recall your experience participating in the consultative experience?
3. What strategies and knowledge have you developed in pursuing your objectives in consultation?
  - a. What was your objective in participating in the consultative experience?
  - b. What strategies did you employ in attempting to achieve your objective?
  - c. What accomplishments did you achieve as a result of participating in the consultative experience?
4. How has your experience in the consultation that you related contributed to how you participate in other consultative experiences?
5. Is there anything else about the experience, its effect or your interpretation that you wish to share?

### Appendix 6 - Data/Transcript Release

I, \_\_\_\_\_, have reviewed the complete transcript of my personal interview in this study, and have been provided with the opportunity to add, alter, and delete information from the transcript as appropriate. I acknowledge that the transcript accurately reflects what I said in my personal interview with Gordon Martell. I hereby authorize the release of this transcript to Gordon Martell to be used in the manner described in the Consent Form. I have received a copy of this Data/Transcript Release Form for my own records.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Researcher

## Appendix 7 – Transcript Review Sample

### Raw Transcript Sample

164 A: Yes, and she was living in [Community]. I got a teaching position there at the  
165 [University], sessional, teaching Native Studies at their Inter-Provincial Universities  
166 North so I had to fly up to [Community] once a week and go teach for a full day and  
167 come back and go back to my classes. That was a good experience. I also tutored at the  
168 [University]. Tutored English.  
169  
170 G: So, your graduate work, how long were you there?  
171  
172 A: I was there for, well, I started in September and it was in about March that [name] the  
173 Chief of [First Nations Community] phoned me and said, “we really need you to come  
174 home, we are running into roadblocks with Indian Affairs” and his words were not nice!  
175 He said, “we need a new school. Our kids are bursting at the seams and not succeeding in  
176 the Provincial Schools in [Community] and [Community].” He said, “you need to come  
177 home. We need a strong negotiator.”  
178  
179 G: He invited you back in what capacity?  
180  
181 A: As the Director of Education. That was my very first time that I was a Director of  
182 Education but the primary purpose was to get that school. It was also interesting times  
183 because that was the times of TLE. The early years of TLE. That was in ‘92 or something  
184 like that, ‘91, around there. So the Band had money and I believe that's why Indian  
185 Affairs was digging in their heels and didn't want to fund that school and figuring that if  
186 they held out long enough, the Band would say the heck with it, we will build our own  
187 school. So I went to bat for them along with [Name] and he was a good vocal, solid  
188 Chief. Together with the Chief and Council and myself, we managed to twist some arms  
189 and kick some shins and negotiated a \$14 million school with the Bands injection to  
190 make that huge gym that they have.  
191  
192 G: It's a great facility. As I define consultation, it's broadly defined. Representing your  
193 community is within that realm of consultation. Your advocacy with INAC, for example,  
194 at that time, you were kind of thrust into that from a classroom teacher to sitting at the  
195 board tables...  
196  
197 A: In Ottawa.  
198  
199 G: What was that like?  
200

201 A: I never thought of it. It was just something I had to do. Much of my youth and  
202 childhood, I was raised by [Name], who was strong-willed. Strong leadership qualities  
203 and my mother, of course. [Name]'s wife, [Name], was my mom's sister. They didn't  
204 have children right away, [Name] and [Name], and my mom had them one after the other,  
205 so it's just the way we are as Indian people. My dad, [Name], apparently the story they  
206 tell is that he had a soft heart for me because I had really bad eczema and he would look  
207 after me so they raised me a lot of the time. I was back and forth between their place and  
208 then the last years of their life I was lucky enough to be able to be working in [First  
209 Nations Community] and living with them.

210

211 G: That was a formative environment then?

212

213 A: With very strong people.

214

215 G: In the political realm, academia; you kind of had some early exposure to that.

216

217 A: And the other one was [Name]. All my life he called me "my baby." It was not so long  
218 ago I graduated to "my girl." So now it's "my girl," not so long ago.

219

220 G: So when you were thrust in or invited into this position...

221

222 A: And actually I wasn't really from there. I had married into that community. My  
223 children are from the community. When I divorced I took my mom's maiden name. I  
224 didn't take my maiden name, I took my mother's maiden name. I skipped back one. It  
225 only made sense being raised by [Name] and [Name] and my mom was an [Family  
226 name]. It made sense to me, I don't know about anybody else. My kids were fine with  
227 that.

228

229 G: There's an order to that. Better than the messing up of names that residential schools  
230 did.

231

232 A: Because they couldn't spell their Cree name. It happened in [First Nations  
233 Community]. I don't know if you know. There's three distinct families of [Family  
234 Name]'s there and the one called [Name] was the literate one and he had his cronies, his  
235 buddies. When the war started, the Second World War, they decided to enlist but, I'm not  
236 sure if it was the second, maybe it was the first. It might have been the First World War.  
237 Anyway, these three guys came walking to Saskatoon and they enlisted in the Army and  
238 [Name] was the one who could speak English. I don't know well but he's the one who  
239 spoke English and then [Name]'s grandfather was one of his cronies and his name was  
240 [Cree Name], and then the other one, I can't remember his name. But anyway, as the



241 Cree language, you know, *niciwam*, is my cousin, so when [Name] explain this when  
242 they were enlisting and these two guys didn't speak English, and that's how the two of  
243 them got the [Family Name] last name and that's why there are three distinct families.  
244  
245 G: The power of arbitrary events.  
246  
247 A: Because they couldn't spell [Name] and that was his only name. He didn't have  
248 another name so all of a sudden he had a new name. ... When you think of your last  
249 name, family name, that's a piece of your identity that you carry. That's just another thing  
250 that the Europeans did to First Nations people is even stripping them of their names.  
251  
252 G: I'm kind of interested in what ... was negotiating a school like back in the early '80s.  
253 You went to Ottawa. Who were the players?  
254  
255 A: I don't even remember.  
256  
257 G: You would have been with the Chief and the community members advocating?  
258  
259 A: The Council, yes, [Name] was a Councilor who became Chief later on. He's always  
260 been in education that [Name].  
261  
262 G: Did you have to evidence the need or what hoops were you jumping through?  
263  
264 A: They really didn't know how to approach it, I guess, so I came home and I created a  
265 proposal with backup evidence and forecasts and stuff like that.  
266  
267 G: You were a technocrat?  
268  
269 A: That was the primary purpose of why the Chief asked me to come home to get the  
270 school so I said, "okay. I'll come home and I'll be there," but by that time I was divorced  
271 so I didn't even really like being there, so I said, "only as long as it takes to get the  
272 school. That's how long I'll stay."  
273  
274 G: How long was that?  
275  
276 A: Three years.  
277  
278 G: How did the INAC bureaucrats receive you coming forward with your proposals?  
279

280 A: I think it was unfamiliar. Especially for a woman to be coming forward like that. I  
281 never really thought of it. It's just something that had to be done.  
282  
283 G: Sure, but even for, it was probably a male-dominated role so...  
284  
285 A: It was, absolutely.  
286  
287 G: So did that strength-based foundation you had in the family mentors, did that prepare  
288 you for those kind of negotiations?  
289  
290 A: I think so but I didn't know. You don't realize you possess certain skills I guess.  
291  
292 G: You didn't know that you were supposed to be scared...  
293  
294 A: Exactly. I didn't realize there was protocol. I just marched right through. I was there  
295 for three years and then I went to the [Tribal Council] which kind of followed in building  
296 the schools theme.  
297  
298 G: What did you build when you were there?  
299  
300 A: Seven schools.  
301  
302 G: Seven schools? Are you serious?  
303  
304 A: Yes.  
305  
306 G: Seven schools?  
307

## Reviewed Transcript Sample

A's mom and adopted dad were strong role models for her and for many in the broader First Nations community.

164-168        “I got a teaching position there at the [University], sessional, teaching Native Studies at their Inter-Provincial Universities North so I had to fly up to [Community] once a week and go teach for a full day and come back and go back to my classes. That was a good experience. I also tutored at the [University]. Tutored English.”

172-177        “...it was in about March that [name] **the Chief of [First Nations Community] phoned me and said, “we really need you to come home, we are running into roadblocks with Indian Affairs”** and his words were not nice! **He said, “we need a new school. Our kids are bursting at the seams and not succeeding in the Provincial Schools in [Community] and [Community].”** He said, **“you need to come home. We need a strong negotiator.”**”

**Recognized skill set.  
Called to serve her community.**

With A being called home to negotiate on the community's behalf, her service to community took on a new urgency. The stakes were higher. I remind myself that the move to Indian Control of Indian Education was a National First Nations movement that would have mobilized the skill and built skills. This context sets the parameters for the innovations in service that inspire me. While studied is the context, little focus has been on the context of the individuals within the social context. By A's own admission, she was likely not ready in a traditional western sense but she answered the call and took on the challenge. I wonder if the Chief called A, called her family or called her potential?

179-190        G: “He invited you back in what capacity?”

A: “As the Director of Education. **That was my very first time that I was a Director of Education but the primary purpose was to get that school.** It was also interesting times because that was the times of TLE. The early years of TLE. That was in '92 or something like that, '91, around there. So the Band had money and I believe that's why Indian Affairs was digging in their heels and didn't want to fund that school and figuring that if they held out long enough, the Band would say the heck with it, we will build our own school. So I went to bat for them along with

[Name] and he was a good vocal, solid Chief. **Together with the Chief and Council and myself, we managed to twist some arms and kick some shins and negotiated a \$14 million school** with the Bands injection to make that huge gym that they have.”

**Called to serve with purpose.**

A consistently refers to the team that she either assembled or participated in. Strategically, she worked with allies that she identifies as committed. She gathered or gravitated to or committed to people of equal commitment. Again, this may be a typical or anticipated more except that the context of subordination of Indigenous peoples required a committed and unified team and that’s what she pursued.

There was no element of boasting in recounting these events. I also began to understand the difference between consulting for a random entity and serving one's own community.

**Humility.**

194-209

“...you were kind of thrust into that from a classroom teacher to sitting at the board tables...

A: “In Ottawa.”

G: “What was that like?”

A: “**I never thought of it. It was just something I had to do. Much of my youth and childhood, I was raised by [Name], who was strong-willed. Strong leadership qualities and my mother, of course. [Name]’s wife, [Name], was my mom's sister. They didn't have children right away, [Name] and [Name], and my mom had them one after the other, so it's just the way we are as Indian people. My dad, [Name], apparently the story they tell is that he had a soft heart for me because I had really bad eczema and he would look after me so they raised me a lot of the time. I was back and forth between their place and then the last years of their life I was lucky enough to be able to be working in [First Nations Community] and living with them.**”

**Motivated by a sense of responsibility.**

**Deliberately acquired a skill set for modeling and teaching.**

A attributed her sense of commitment and responsibility to her upbringing and the values instilled in her. This gave, for me, a new meaning to strategy. The fact that A brought forward her strength of character and commitment from her family does not diminish her contribution because she didn't invent a strategy in isolation but she brought forward those equalities at the right place and time. The strategic response is shared intergenerationally.

249-252      **“When you think of your last name, family name, that's a piece of your identity that you carry. That's just another thing that the Europeans did to First Nations people is even stripping them of their names.”**

266-267      **“They really didn't know how to approach it, I guess, so I came home and I created a proposal with backup evidence and forecasts and stuff like that.”**

**Being prepared.**

A appears to master the skills of lobbying but I spend little time unpacking that because she did what she had to do to play in the arena that she finds herself in. More characteristic of her deliberate, unique and strategic action is that she is there in the first place. At that time, a strong Indigenous woman at the board tables of INAC must have been met with interesting reactions in a polite yet politically charged environment. In fact, work that I have done for First Nations years later showed me how INAC bureaucrats treated respected First Nations men. I was shocked by the condescension they showed those individuals. I have to imagine that the context for A was at least that and more.

271-274      **“That was the primary purpose of why the Chief asked me to come home to get the school so I said, “okay. I'll come home and I'll be there,” but by that time I was divorced so I didn't even really like being there, so I said, “only as long as it takes to get the school. That's how long I'll stay.””**

**Personal sacrifice.**

280-283      G: “How did the INAC bureaucrats receive you coming forward with your proposals?”

A: **“I think it was unfamiliar. Especially for a woman to be coming forward like that. I never really thought of it. It's just something that had to be done.”**

289-315 G: “So did that strength-based foundation you had in the family mentors, did that prepare you for those kind of negotiations?”

A: “I think so but I didn't know. **You don't realize you possess certain skills I guess.”**

**Humility.  
Incremental acquisition of skills.**

G: “You didn't know that you were supposed to be scared...”

A: “Exactly. **I didn't realize there was protocol. I just marched right through. I was there for three years and then I went to the [Tribal Council] which kind of followed in building the schools theme.”**

A's admission of defying protocols to get things done is not naïve. I have been in many like situations and felt the rise of unfamiliar territory rise up to meet me, even if I didn't know what I didn't know. The tenacity to plow right through, though, is the remarkable skill.

G: **“What did you build when you were there?”**

A: **“Seven schools.”**

G: **“Seven schools? Are you serious?”**

A: **“Yes.”**

G: **“Seven schools?”**